

THE MARTYRED CHURCH

A History of the Church of the East

David Wilmshurst



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THE MARTYRED CHURCH
A History of the Church of the East

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FOREWORD

Western historians have conventionally divided Christendom into the Latin West and the Greek East, ignoring a third important element in the Christian world, the Syriac-speaking Churches which in the first crucial centuries of the Christian era spanned the frontiers of the Roman and Persian Empires. This indifference has a number of causes. Firstly, these Churches have always existed in the shadow of other, more dominant cultures: Greek Christianity in the case of the Syrian Orthodox Church, and Zoroastrianism and Islam in the case of the Church of the East. Secondly, the Syriac-speaking Churches became separated from mainstream Christendom in the fifth and sixth centuries as a result of theological disputes, and were thereafter regarded by Westerners as heretical. Thirdly, these Churches have now been reduced by political pressure to a shadow of their former selves, and do little to draw attention to themselves. Finally, Eurocentric historians have been less interested in the fortunes of the Churches on the extreme eastern fringe of Christianity (as they would put it) than in those of Churches closer to home.

During the twentieth century interest in the Syriac-speaking Churches gradually grew, as automatic assumptions of Western cultural superiority were challenged. Western historians themselves discovered the validity of an approach to history which does not marginalise events outside Europe; and Christian scholars in Asia, Africa and South America, anxious to break with the colonial past of their Churches, were increasingly attracted by the study of a Semitic Christianity descended directly from the early Church in Judaea, whose believers spoke much the same language as Jesus himself and expressed their faith, at least in the early centuries of the Christian era, in forms free from the influence of the Greek philosophical tradition.

This book deals with the Church of the East or, as it is more widely known, the Nestorian Church, arguably the most interesting of the Syriac-speaking Churches. Few Christians nowadays outside the Middle East are familiar with its name, let alone its history, yet between the ninth and fourteenth centuries it was in geographical extent the largest Christian Church in the world, with dioceses

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stretching from Egypt right across Asia to China. The Church of the East was essentially the Church of the western provinces of Sasanian Persia, where Christianity had gained a firm foothold by the end of the third century. These first Christian communities were reinforced in the third and fourth centuries by deportations of Christians from the eastern Roman Empire during a succession of wars between Rome and Persia. Although the Persian Church experienced several severe persecutions, notably during the reign of Shapur II (339–79), it grew considerably during the Sasanian period.

In 497 the leadership of the Persian Church adopted the strict dyophysite christology espoused by Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹ This controversial christology, which had recently been condemned in the Roman Empire, was widely associated with the archbishop Nestorius of Constantinople, who had been deposed in 431 for his views, and was hence known by its opponents as Nestorianism. The victory of the dyophysites gave the Persian Church its traditional name, the Nestorian Church. After the Persian Empire was conquered by the Muslim Arabs in the seventh century the Church of the East was recognised by the new rulers as a *dhimmi*, or protected minority. Although Christians in the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphates were often subject to the oppressive Muslim laws of restriction, their numbers enabled them to maintain their faith without serious challenge, and their leaders mixed in Muslim high society. In the ninth century, during the reign of the influential patriarch Timothy I (780–823), Nestorian communities could be found in Palestine and Syria, in Mesopotamia and Persia, in Armenia and Azerbaijan, across Central Asia, in India, Arabia and Soqatra, and in China and Tibet. The Nestorian patriarchs sat in Baghdad, the capital of the 'Abbasid caliphate, and had around twenty metropolitans and over a hundred bishops under their authority.

During the Seljuq period, as a result of Islamic pressure, the Church of the East began to decline in its traditional Mesopotamian heartland, but made compensating gains in its mission field in Central Asia. Christianity died out in southern Mesopotamia and most of Persia, and the Nestorians began to consolidate in northern Mesopotamia and Kurdistan. But at the same time, beyond the lands of Islam, Nestorian missionaries converted several Turkish tribes to Christianity. The Nestorians enjoyed a brief revival in the final decades of the thirteenth century, under the tolerant rule of the Mongols. During this period the Church of the East revived its former presence in China. But appearances were deceptive. As Mongol power waned throughout Asia during the fourteenth century the vacuum was filled not by Christianity but by Islam. The Nestorian communities in Central Asia were reduced by plague in the middle years of the fourteenth century, and also faced aggressive Muslim proselytism. Many of them converted to Islam at this period, and those that did not were probably wiped out

during the terrible campaigns of Timur Leng towards the end of the fourteenth century. Nestorian Christians were also expelled from China after the fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in 1368. By the fifteenth century, with the exception of a significant offshoot in India and a few small outlying communities elsewhere, the Church of the East was reduced to a rough triangle of territory in northern Mesopotamia between Mosul and Lakes Van and Urmia.

The Church of the East was permanently divided into two sections, one Nestorian and one Catholic, by a schism in 1552. The new converts were called Chaldeans by the Vatican, and for the next four centuries the Nestorian and Chaldean Churches spent most of their energies feuding with each other. Thanks to the influence of European missionaries, the nineteenth century was a period of growth and relative prosperity for both Churches, and in 1913 they had a combined population of a little over 200,000 members. The twentieth century, by contrast, was disastrous. The Christian populations of the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire were severely reduced during the First World War, and the Nestorians of the Hakkari and Urmia regions were driven from their ancestral homelands by the Turks and their Kurdish allies. Several thousand Nestorians and Chaldeans still cling to their centuries-old villages in Kurdistan, uneasily straddling the borders of the modern states of Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, but in far fewer numbers than in 1913. Meanwhile, emigration from Kurdistan has created a large Nestorian and Chaldean diaspora in the United States, Europe and Australia. The modern Nestorians prefer to call themselves Assyrians, and have renamed their Church the 'Assyrian Church of the East'. The Assyrian Church, presently led by the patriarch Dinkha IV Hnanya, claims around 385,000 members. A further 60,000 Nestorians or Assyrians belong to a splinter group that calls itself the Ancient Church of the East. The Chaldean Church claims around half a million members.

The Church of the East is often referred to by Western writers as the Nestorian Church. Unfortunately, this term gives a very misleading impression of the course of events after 497. The strict dyophysite christology of the Church of the East was never technically heretical, although the Nestorians always regarded the condemnation of Nestorius himself as an act of injustice. Moreover, the Church of the East never considered itself as holding a heretical position, but as upholding catholic doctrine. Insofar as the term 'Nestorian' implies a marginal, heretical position, it fails to do justice to the achievements of the Church of the East. Although scholars based in China, where political correctness has not yet taken hold, continue to write without apology about 'Nestorian crosses' and the 'Nestorian stele' of Sian, most European and American scholars prefer to refer to the Nestorian Church as the Church of the East, and to call its members East

Syrian or East Syriac Christians. I myself used the term 'East Syrian' widely in my first book on the Church of the East, an academic study of the Church's dioceses from 1318 onwards.

Unfortunately, the term 'East Syrian' seems out of place in a book aimed at a more popular readership, but it is difficult to decide how to replace it. The problem, quite simply, is that while the term 'Church of the East' has won wide acceptance, there is no wholly satisfactory name for its members. The Nestorians often called themselves 'Easterners' (*madnhaye*), but so did the members of the rival Jacobite Church resident in Persia, to distinguish themselves from the Jacobites living within the territories to the west that had once been Roman. Calling the members of the Church of the East 'Assyrians', a fad originating with the Anglican missionary William Ainger Wigram at the beginning of the twentieth century, is both anachronistic (since the Assyrian identity only gained widespread acceptance after the First World War) and misleading (since this identity has little historical basis in fact). There are also objections to calling them 'Persian' or 'Syrian' Christians as a blanket term, though I have used both terms in certain contexts.

For the sake of simplicity and fidelity to historical usage, I have decided to use the term Nestorian in most contexts. For most of their history, members of the Church of the East were known as Nestorians, just as their Syrian Orthodox rivals were known as Jacobites. Between the sixth and the nineteenth centuries members of the Church of the East were called Nestorians not only by the Muslims and by other Christians, but also—just as importantly—by themselves. Examples of this usage could be multiplied indefinitely, but here I will only cite two particular instances. In 1298 an East Syrian manuscript was copied in the town of Akhlat on Lake Van, 'in the church of the blessed Nestorians'. In 1843 the Kochanes patriarch Shem'on XVII Abraham told the Anglican missionary George Percy Badger that all Christians were Christians, 'but we alone are Nestorians.' The simple fact is that for most of its history the Church of the East made no secret of its admiration for Nestorius and did not object to being described as Nestorian, though it denied the connotations of heresy that its enemies saw in the term. In this book, therefore, I have referred to Nestorian Christians and the Nestorian Church during the fourteen centuries when this was what they called themselves. By the same token, I have used the term 'Assyrian' to refer to the Nestorian branch of the Church of the East after 1914, as that is what the Nestorians have called themselves for most of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, it is important to insist that the Nestorians are not heretics now, nor ever have been. The issue of heresy has been dealt with in an influential article by Sebastian Brock, 'The Nestorian Church: A Lamentable Misnomer'. This article argues that the traditional conception of Christian orthodoxy, which

brands as heretical most so-called monophysite and dyophysite deviations from the Chalcedonian norm, is too strict. Brock has pointed out, quite correctly, that the true positions of both the Jacobites and the Nestorians were caricatured by their opponents, and that the Syriac expressions commonly used to translate the key terms of the christological debate were not always identical in meaning to their Greek equivalents. It was thus possible for the dyophysite theologians revered by the Church of the East and the miaphysite theologians of the Syrian Orthodox Church to profess orthodox views which merely appeared heretical to their opponents. Brock has proposed instead a more nuanced model, which does greater justice to the theology of the Syriac-speaking Churches and welcomes back to the fold of Christian orthodoxy the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Church of the East, and perhaps even Nestorius himself (if we could only be sure what he taught). Only the heresiarch Eutyches and his monophysite followers, who contumaciously rejected the doctrine of Christ's consubstantiality, are beyond the reach of modern Christian charity. I have therefore used the term 'Nestorian' in this book as a shorthand way of referring to the Theodoran christology adopted by the Nestorians at the end of the fifth century, but without any connotation of heresy (except when I put that term in the mouth of Jacobite or Chalcedonian theologians). I have also used the term 'monophysite' as it was used by the Nestorians, as a term of abuse for their opponents, and have preferred the term 'miaphysite' to refer to the orthodox doctrine of the single nature in Christ espoused by the Syrian Orthodox Church.

In this book I have written primarily about the subjects that interest me. I am not a practising Christian myself, though I used to be one, and I am no more virtuous than most other liberal agnostics. When I was an Oxford undergraduate I was a member of the Order of Saint Elizabeth of Portugal, a theological port-drinking society, but although my membership has given me a lifelong taste for port, it did little to further my appreciation of theology. Nevertheless, I can understand the appeal of this splendid discipline for scholars of a certain temperament, and am confident that, with perseverance, I could master its subtleties. In the past few months I have bent my brows over several books and scholarly articles on the christological disputes of the fifth and sixth centuries, and I hope that I have correctly grasped the points at issue. I am only mildly interested in the distinctive forms of worship practised in the Church of the East, and not interested at all in the study of its liturgy. I am unable to respond to the undoubted beauties of many of the Nestorian hymns, perhaps because their tunes are often missing, though I can still be moved to tears by many of the hymns of my own Anglican tradition. I find it particularly difficult to understand the appeal of Syriac monasticism, and am repelled by much of the surviving ascetic

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literature. Although I rather like Isaac of Nineveh, I have been unable to enjoy, even with the most determined effort of the imagination, the arid devotional texts of Joseph Hazzaya and John of Dalyatha. While other Christians, truer to the spirit of their faith, were preaching the Gospel beyond the lands of Islam, in Central Asia, India and China, sometimes at risk to their lives, the ascetics thought only about their own spiritual health. They refused to dirty their hands by living in the world of men, like their fellow Christians. It is difficult to understand these irresponsible, self-absorbed elitists, let alone to admire them, and it is not hard to see why they were so disliked by the leaders of the Church.

I am far more interested in the experience of a Christian Church that has subsisted for most of its history under Muslim rule, and have tried my best to convey something of the atmosphere of life for Christians under the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs and the Ottoman sultans. Though I do not believe that Christianity ever had any chance of supplanting Islam during the Mongol period, I found the sheer drama of events in the second half of the thirteenth century irresistible, and have therefore given generous space to the reign of the Ongut patriarch Yahballaha III. I also enjoy scandal and intrigue, and as there is plenty of both in the history of the Church of the East, I have filled many pages of this book with anecdotes which appeal to my sense of irony. I was struck by how often the Nestorians have lied about the history of their Church, and have tried to expose their frauds for what they are. I believe historians, especially ecclesiastical historians, should tell the truth, not repeat pious legends. The falsification of history, of course, is not a vice confined to Syriac-speaking Christians. Even my own Church of England has occasionally yielded to the temptation to make things look better than they really were. But the Nestorians have excelled in the art of plausible invention, and I think it is important to make clear that much of what they have said about their past cannot be trusted. I have not tried to disguise my own sympathies in this book, and have occasionally made harsh judgements, particularly on some of the more recent Nestorian patriarchs. This, again, is a personal preference. I myself like to read books by historians who have a particular vision of the truth and defend it passionately, and I dislike those who fastidiously avoid making any moral judgements whatsoever or, worse, sanitise or romanticise the past.

While I was at Oxford I had the great good fortune to be taught Greek History by Robin Lane Fox, who made his name with his studies of Alexander the Great and went on to write two immensely important books about Christianity, *Pagans and Christians* and *The Unauthorized Version*. Robin Lane Fox taught history as he writes it, as the record of the strange, amusing and often admirable behaviour of men and women in the ancient world. He taught me always to bear in mind the

exhilarating variety of human motives. Human beings are capable of great evil, but they are also capable of great good. They are not always consistent in what they do and say, and their behaviour is often hypocritical. He also encouraged me to write in clear, vigorous English prose, and to avoid the obfuscations that disfigure so much contemporary academic discourse. My subsequent career as a colonial administrator in the Hong Kong Government from 1979 to 1992 was also an invaluable education for a budding historian. Contrary to popular opinion, colonial governments have never been absolute despotisms, and I spent much of my time negotiating with the local elites without whose support nothing could get done. Many of the politicians and businessmen I met during this period seemed to me to be motivated primarily by vanity or greed, but there were also many others of a finer stamp, who valued the moral, aesthetic and technical satisfactions of good government. The contrast between the petulant and erratic Chaldean patriarch Joseph VI Audo (1848–79) and his quietly competent successor Emmanuel II Thomas (1900–47) no longer surprises me, because I have encountered both their modern equivalents among the members of Hong Kong's Legislative Council.

Many of the patriarchs and bishops of the Nestorian and Chaldean Churches have been crooks and charlatans, and some of them have been murderers too, but their misdemeanours are only one side of the story. Any fair appraisal of the history of the Church of the East must also recognise the zeal of its missionaries, the acumen of its theologians, the spirituality of its solitaries and the sheer doggedness with which the members of this beleaguered Church have continued to uphold the Christian faith in the lands of Islam for nearly one and a half millennia. Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, writing eighty years ago, described the humble Nestorian Christians who preserved their faith after the Arab conquest as 'martyrs'. The passage in which he did so deserves to be quoted:

After the Arab conquest, throughout the lands that were once part of the territory of the Sasanian Empire, the Christians lived much as they still do today in Turkey and Persia. Tolerated but despised as second-class citizens, rarely persecuted but often harassed and tormented, the Nestorians have suffered a relentless process of attrition over the centuries. So long as there were still fire-worshippers, conversions still took place; but from the closing years of the eighth century in Mesopotamia and western Iran, and a little later in the Caspian and Eastern regions, the Christians maintained themselves only within their own communities, handing down their faith from one generation to the next. Hardly any examples are known of mass apostasies, but many Christians, worn

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down by incessant attacks of varying severity upon their faith, or tempted by the prospects of marriage with a Muslim, must have abandoned their beliefs. But far more numerous, especially in the wilds of Adiabene, Kurdistan and Adarbaigan, were the Christians who stubbornly remained in their humble villages, at the mercy of their oppressors: bloodthirsty Kurdish tribesmen, who constantly plundered and raided their villages, and grasping Arab landowners, who swindled them out of their best lands or simply stole them from them, killing anybody who stood in their way. They were true martyrs for the Christian faith, since they could have put an end to their trials by simply converting to Islam.

Here, as on most other occasions, Tisserant's judgement was entirely sound; and I have borrowed his fine characterisation of the Nestorians for the title of this book: *The Martyred Church*.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help and encouragement I have received during the past two years. In the first place, I am grateful for the tact and understanding shown by Dr Sahar Huneidi of East & West Publishing Ltd, who kept me on the lightest of reins and allowed me to write a longer and more complex text than we had originally envisaged. Thanks to her generosity, I have been able to write the book I have always wanted to write. It was also a pleasure to work with her colleague Leonard Harrow, who accompanied me on my journey of exploration, improved my defective knowledge of the topography of medieval Iran, and saw the book through to final publication briskly and efficiently. In this respect, thanks are also due to two Christian friends of mine in Hong Kong, John Leighton and Julian Stargardt, who helped me proofread the final text and made a number of valuable suggestions. I had never imagined that publishing a book could be such a painless experience.

I am also grateful for the help and information I have received from several enthusiasts. Thomas Carlson gave me very valuable comments on a draft of Chapter Seven, and convinced me that life was considerably bleaker for Christians in the 'dark centuries' than I had earlier been inclined to believe. He also gave me an advance copy of an article he had written on the fifteenth-century Nestorian author Isaac Shbadnaya, which will shortly appear in the online journal *Hugoye*. Julian Faultless very kindly shared his own work on 'Abdallah ibn al-Tayyib with me. Nenif d'Beth Mutran, a member of the family of the metropolitans of Shemsdin, provided some valuable information on the careers of several twentieth-century Assyrian bishops, and also told me some enjoyable stories about the recent history of the Assyrian Church of the East that are, alas, far

Foreword

too sensitive for me to repeat here. Mike Arnold and Kim Salkeld, old friends of mine from my Hong Kong Government days, have shared my pleasure in Mari's anecdotes of the behaviour of the Nestorian patriarchs under the 'Abbasid caliphs, and have encouraged me to interpret the politics of this period with due cynicism. I also owe Mike Arnold an enormous debt of gratitude for drawing all of the maps in this book. Mar Awa Royel, the Assyrian bishop of California, provided some valuable information on the hierarchy of the Assyrian Church of the East since the First World War, and also identified the subject of Illustration 4. Lucas van Rompay persuaded me to take a more sympathetic attitude towards Assyrian nationalism, and to modify my trenchant judgements of some of the more recent Nestorian patriarchs. Sebastian Brock headed me off from making numerous errors in every chapter, and did his best to persuade me to avoid the term 'Nestorian'. I have accepted his advice everywhere else, and I am not at all sure that I was right to go my own way in this one, crucial, respect. Finally, I would like to thank my Indonesian girlfriend Diyah Aprilia, who made sense of some of the more obscure references to Islam in Mari's history of the Nestorian patriarchs, and helped me to understand what it meant ten centuries ago, and what it still means now, to be a Muslim. She is the best advertisement for Islam I know.

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Chapter One
THE CHURCH BEYOND ROME
(AD 36–502)

OVERVIEW

The history of the Church of the East before the fourth century is shrouded in mystery. All that can be said with confidence about it is that, whoever brought Christianity to Mesopotamia, Persia and India, it was not the apostles Addai, Mari and Thomas, the legendary founders of the Christian communities beyond the Roman Empire. Christianity seems to have taken root first among the Jewish communities of Mesopotamia, and to have been brought separately to Fars (southwest Persia) and India by Christian merchants. During the third and fourth centuries the native Christian communities in the Sasanian Empire were swollen by the deportation of large numbers of Christians from the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire and by the cession of Nisibis and its hinterland by Rome to Persia in 363 after the failure of Julian the Apostate's invasion of Persia. During the fourth century the Church developed a unique form of monasticism, which owed little to contemporary developments in Egypt. In the Sasanian Empire, 'sons and daughters of the covenant' did not at first withdraw to the desert as solitaries, but remained in their communities to set a Christian example. A distinctive Christian literature in Syriac and Persian also emerged at this period, one of whose earliest exponents was the 'Persian sage' Aphrahat.

By and large the Church of the East was tolerated by the Sasanian kings, though Christians were always suspect during periods of warfare with Rome, and the Church was subjected to a devastating persecution during the reign of Shapur II (339–79) and to several less severe attacks from some of Shapur's successors. Despite these persecutions, the Church continued to flourish, and in 410 was recognised by the 'Westerners', as the Christians of the Roman Empire were called, as an autocephalous Church, whose 'grand metropolitan' sat at the Sasanian capital of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. At this period the Church of the East was organised into five metropolitan provinces, and had just under 50 regular dioceses in Mesopotamia, Persia, Arabia and India. This appearance of unity in

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fact masked deep divisions between the Christians of Mesopotamia and those of Fars, Arabia and India.

—In 497 the Church of the East underwent a profound change. The leadership of the Church fell to a hardline party of strict dyophysites, many of whom had received their theological training inside the Roman Empire, in the influential 'Persian School' of Edessa. These men championed a christology regarded with deep suspicion by the Roman Church. Their beliefs have traditionally been associated with Nestorianism, the heresy imputed to Nestorius, archbishop of Constantinople from 428 to 431, but the new leaders of the Persian Church were influenced far more by the orthodox teachings of Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia than by the reported views of Nestorius. Modern scholars are inclined to defend the orthodoxy of the dyophysite christology of the Church of the East; but as far as its Roman contemporaries were concerned, the Persian Church was taken over in 497 by heretics indoctrinated with Nestorianism. Henceforth the Church of the East became, to most outsiders, the Nestorian Church.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Spread of Christianity in the Parthian Empire. Western historians have in the past concentrated so much on the study of the rise of Christianity within the territory of the Roman Empire that its equally impressive spread to the east of Judaea has received little attention. Judaea, an eastern border province of the Roman Empire in Christ's lifetime, was the geographical centre of the underground Christian world in the first three centuries of the Christian era. Beyond Rome's eastern frontier lay the extensive territories of the Parthian Empire, where conditions were at least as favourable for the spread of the Christian message.

A traveller crossing the border near Nisibis would certainly never have been in any doubt as to whether he was in Roman or Parthian territory. Both empires maintained strong garrisons along the border, and military posts and fortresses lay thick both along the frontier itself and for miles behind it, a visible reminder of imperial power. The Parthian and Roman forces on the frontier embodied and reflected two very different imperial styles, and their organisation, appearance and tactics offered a striking contrast. On the Roman side were the heavy infantry of the legions, recruited from Italy, Gaul, Africa and Asia, and during the Parthian period entirely Latin-speaking. The Parthians, on the other hand, despised the use of infantry, which they employed chiefly as cannon-fodder, and their armies were mainly composed of highly mobile horse archers, skilled in the famous 'Parthian

shot', stiffened by *clibanarii*, mail-clad cataphracts armed with heavy lances for the mass cavalry charge. Like the Romans, the Parthians drew their frontier armies from every province of their empire, and a form of Persian was the *lingua franca* of the Parthian army, just as Latin was of the Roman.

But around these frontier armies lived a population whose land had been divided between two rival empires by the chances of warfare. Although they might be Roman or Parthian subjects, the people of Mesopotamia thought of themselves as Syrians, spoke a common language, Syriac, and shared a common culture. Understanding neither Latin nor Persian, the inhabitants of Roman and Parthian Mesopotamia—Beth Nahrin, as it was called in Syriac, 'the land of the two rivers'—had more in common with their neighbours across the border than with the imperial garrisons planted in their territory. Because Syriac was spoken from Roman Antioch on the Mediterranean as far east as Parthian Adiabene on the eastern bank of the Tigris, there was no language barrier to the spread of Christianity into Persia. While the Christian message had to be translated into Greek, Latin and Coptic, and perhaps also Celtic and Punic, for its effective spread within the Roman Empire, in the western provinces of the Parthian Empire it needed no translation. Travel was also no problem. The great trade routes to China ran through the Parthian Empire, and in its western half the traveller enjoyed good roads and the amenities of the huge cities of the Fertile Crescent: Seleucia-Ctesiphon with a population of nearly 500,000, and Palmyra and Nisibis with perhaps 200,000 each—cities rivalled in the Roman Empire only by Antioch, Alexandria and Rome itself. The frontier itself was easily crossed, and traders and travellers went to and fro with little hindrance. For most of the second half of the first century, the crucial formative phase of Christianity, Rome and Parthia were at peace, apart from occasional squabbles between the rulers of the small buffer states which it suited both empires to maintain.

Social conditions in Parthia were as propitious for the spread of Christianity as in the Roman Empire. In the West, Christianity flourished mainly in the towns, and mainly among free men and women at the lower end of the social scale; less so (though there were striking exceptions) among the rich and well-educated and among the slave population. In the stratified world of pagan Rome slaves were often treated with heartless brutality, women were inferior to men, and the poor were regarded with contempt by their betters. Although the Christians were not social revolutionaries, and could not imagine a world without slaves, they preached the seductive message that God valued all men and women, regardless of their status, and had sent his son Jesus Christ into the world to suffer and die for their sins. Christians were commanded to care for one another, and communal charity was a notable feature of the new religion. The Christians maintained their solidarity

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in death as well as life. Awed by the courage shown by a group of martyrs in the arena, some pagans exclaimed: 'See how these Christians love one another!' The Christian message had an obvious attraction for the downtrodden, but it also spoke to the hearts of men and women of all conditions. The lofty ethical teachings of Christianity, largely derived from Judaism, impressed many educated pagans; and as the early Christians deliberately jettisoned many of the parochial rituals that they had inherited from the Jews, including the painful practice of circumcision, their religion had a universal appeal that Judaism lacked. 'You are no longer Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, men or women: but you are all one in Jesus Christ,' Saint Paul admonished the Christians of Galatia (Galatians 3:28). Social attitudes in pagan Parthia did not differ markedly from those in pagan Rome, and the urban conglomerations of the Parthian Empire offered Christian missionaries similar opportunities to those which the early Church had successfully exploited in Antioch, Jerusalem, Corinth, Alexandria and Rome.

The Christians also found a large proportion of their earliest converts among the Jews, and here also conditions in the East were favourable. There was a large Jewish population in the lands to the east of the Roman Empire, whose beginnings went back to the Babylonian Captivity of 586 BC. After the Babylonians had conquered the kingdom of Judah, part of the Jewish population had been deported into slavery. Although Cyrus the Great, the Persian conqueror of Babylonia, had permitted the Jews to return to their homeland in 538 BC, many Jews had remained behind. Since then their numbers had grown. It has been estimated that the Jews of the diaspora numbered about five million in the first century AD, of whom at least one million lived outside the Roman Empire. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Jews from the Parthian Empire—'Parthians and Medes, and Elamites and dwellers in Mesopotamia'—were among the pilgrims in Jerusalem who heard Peter and the other disciples preach the good news of Christ's resurrection in AD 36. Adiabene, a client kingdom on the western borders of the Parthian Empire at this period, was governed by a Jewish queen, Helen, who relieved a serious famine among her fellow Jews in Palestine in AD 40. These were precisely the regions of the Parthian Empire where Christians first put down roots.

Because relations between Rome and Parthia were normally cool, Parthia offered the opportunity for Roman dissidents to defect to the east. A number of Jewish sects preferred to practise their religion beyond Rome's borders rather than in their occupied homeland. They included a group of baptists, the followers of a certain Elchasai, who settled in southern Iraq early in the second century. Parthia also offered sanctuary to Roman Christians, particularly during periods of persecution. Warfare between Rome and Parthia also brought in Christians, either prisoners from the Roman armies or occupying troops. Frontier changes

temporarily brought Parthian cities within the borders of the Roman Empire, where their citizens would have mixed with Roman garrisons. Some of the soldiers who served in Dura Europos and the other Roman garrisons on the eastern borders were Christians, and informal contacts between these men and the Syrians among whom they lived offered an excellent channel for the transmission of Christianity. Something of the sort seems to have happened at Nisibis, which was captured by the Romans in 165. Nisibis had a substantial Jewish population, and before the end of the second century it also had a Christian community. The Phrygian bishop Abercius, who visited the city a few years after it came under Roman rule, met fellow-Christians not only in Roman Antioch and Edessa, but also in recently-Persian Nisibis: 'I saw the plain of Syria, and the cities, and Nisibis, crossing east over the Euphrates. Everywhere I went, under the protection of Paul, I met my kinsmen.'

It is just possible that Persia's earliest Christians were some of the Parthian Jews who listened to Peter preach in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost, when the disciples are said to have made 3,000 converts. At any rate, the roads to the East were soon followed by other Christians. The persecution of the infant Christian Church in Jerusalem recorded in Acts, which culminated in the stoning of Stephen, forced many Christians to flee north to Antioch. East of Jerusalem was only the inhospitable Syrian desert. But Antioch was the western terminus of the Silk Road. From its eastern gate merchants set out along the caravan routes which ran through Parthia into India, or further east still to China, the fabled land of the Seres or 'Silk People'. Here was a fertile field for missionary activity, and a chance to escape the persecution which threatened them inside the borders of the Roman Empire.

Individual Christians may therefore have set out from Antioch on the roads eastwards into pagan Parthia as early as the middle of the first century, though doubtless not in large numbers. From Edessa they followed the Persian 'Royal Road', maintained by the forced labour of the communities along its route, which ran through Mesopotamia, following the Tigris for most of its route, down to the great port of Spasinou Charax on the Persian Gulf. The regions that lay along the Royal Road and its chief branches were not only the areas where the earliest Christian settlements in the Parthian Empire were established, but were also the areas of greatest Christian growth during the early Sasanian period. These regions, known to the Romans as Zabdicene, Adiabene, Babylonia, Garamaea, Messene and Elam, were called by their Syriac-speaking inhabitants Beth Zabdai, Hadyab, Beth Aramaye, Beth Garmai, Maishan and Beth Huzaye, and would later form the territories of the six great 'interior' metropolitan provinces of the Church of the East. From Spasinou Charax, Christian merchants could have sailed onwards to Fars, Arabia and India. Wherever they went, these early

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Christians found themselves surrounded by obstinate pagans. Zoroastrianism was common in Persia itself, and although less popular among the non-Persian population of Mesopotamia, nevertheless constituted a considerable hindrance to Christian missionary activity. A variety of heathen gods were also worshipped, notably Nebo and Bel. The wealthy Arab merchants of Palmyra also honoured the goddess Ishtar, and paid cult to the local sun and moon gods Iarhibol and Aglibol. A similar collection of sky gods and nature gods could be found in every city of the Parthian Empire. Persian Christians, like their counterparts in the Roman Empire, recoiled in horror at the perversity of their neighbours. Did they not realise that the objects of their worship were mere idols?

Although virtually nothing is known of the process by which this happened, by 225 there were Christian communities not only in Mesopotamia but also in Media and Fars, and further afield still in Gilan, on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, and in the mountain fastnesses of the Hindu Kush, where Parthian rule gave way to that of the local Kushan dynasty. The evidence is to be found in a passage in the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, written by Philip, a disciple of the late second-century gnostic scholar Bardaisan, which contrasted the disciplined communal life of the Christians with the disgraceful customs of the various peoples among which they lived. To make his point, the author pressed into service almost every unfavourable racial stereotype known to the ancient world:

What should we say about this new Christian family of ours, which Christ established at his coming in every place and in every region? We are called by just one name, Christians, the people of Christ. We all assemble on one and the same day, Sunday, and we all abstain from food on the same fixed days. Our brothers in Gaul do not consort with other men, nor do those in Parthia marry two wives, nor are those in Judaea circumcised, nor do our sisters in Gilan and Kushan sleep with strangers. Our brothers in Fars do not marry their daughters, nor do those in Media shun their dead, or bury people alive, or feed them to the dogs. Our brothers in Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who commit adultery, nor do those in Hatra stone thieves to death. They simply distance themselves from their neighbours, handing them over to the judgement of God. No matter where they are, the local customs do not tempt them away from the law of Christ.

Sadly, Philip missed a trick. He forgot to mention one important Christian community of whose existence he surely knew. Persian Christians had long ago

followed the well-established trade route from the Persian Gulf to India, and by 225 could be found in several parts of the subcontinent. Philip might have appositely rounded off his list with the Christians of the Malabar Coast: 'Nor do our brothers in India burn their widows to death.'

The Foundation Legends of the Church of the East. Who were the men behind the spread of Christianity in the East? Certainly not the 'Three Kings of Orient', the Zoroastrian astrologers from the Parthian Empire who brought gifts to the infant Jesus, though they would later be claimed by the patriarch Timothy I (780–823), surely mischievously, as Christians *avant la lettre*. Certainly not Saint Bartholemew or Saint Nathaniel either, who were said to have preached in Babylonia by the twelfth-century Nestorian writer Mari; nor Saint Peter, who was placed at the head of the Church of the East's list of patriarchs several decades ago by the patriarch Shem'on XXI Eshai because of his supposed connection with 'the Church that is in Babylon'. Even their inventors hardly took these fantasies seriously. Other myths, however, have been tenaciously held for centuries in the Church of the East, and are still potent today. According to an elaborate corpus of legends developed by Syriac-speaking Christians between the third and sixth centuries, much of the work of evangelisation of the lands beyond the Roman Empire was done in the first century AD, by the apostles Addai, Mari and Thomas. Distinct geographical areas of activity were ascribed to each of these men. Addai, one of the seventy apostles, evangelised the small buffer state of Osrhoene, converting its king Abgar, and from there took the gospel into the Parthian Empire, preaching in Beth Zabdai and Adiabene. His disciple Mari, another of the seventy apostles, is credited with the evangelisation of Babylonia and southern Mesopotamia. He preached in the cities of Radhan and Seleucia-Ctesiphon, consecrated a bishop for Kashkar, and founded the monastery of Dorqoni, where his body was buried. The apostle Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, evangelised Persian-speaking Fars and, more famously, India, where he arrived by sea after being sold as a slave to an Indian master.

At first sight, a rare reference in a Roman source appears to support at least one of these traditions. The fourth-century Greek ecclesiastical historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who was well aware of the existence of Christian communities in Persia, almost completely ignored their history. His subject was the spread of Christianity within the Roman Empire, and he stuck closely to his brief. Only rarely did he notice events that had taken place beyond Rome's eastern frontiers. At the end of the first book of his *Ecclesiastical History* he told the story of the conversion of the king Abgar V of Edessa shortly after the death of Jesus. In the first century AD Edessa was the capital of nominally-independent Osrhoene,

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a state that lay on the border between the Roman and Parthian Empires and survived at the good pleasure of their rulers. Osroene lost its independence in the third century, and when Eusebius was writing Edessa was a Roman city and therefore worthy of his notice. Eusebius quoted from a supposed exchange of correspondence between Jesus and Abgar, and also included a long extract from a Greek translation of a Syriac document which he claimed, impressively, to have found in the archives of Edessa.

According to Eusebius, Abgar had heard of the miracles of Jesus, and wrote to beg him to come to Edessa to heal him of a disease which his own doctors had been unable to cure. He also offered Jesus sanctuary in the city from the plots of the Jews. 'I happen to own a city,' he wrote. 'Not a big one but quite old, and it will do very well for the two of us.' Jesus replied to this delightful missive, commending Abgar's faith, explaining that his mission in Judaea prevented him from coming to Edessa in person, and promising to send one of his disciples to heal Abgar and save both him and his people. Shortly after Jesus's death the apostle Thomas sent Thaddeus, one of the seventy apostles, to Edessa to redeem this promise. Thaddeus was summoned to the king's presence, and Abgar immediately recognised him as the disciple promised by Jesus. Thaddeus healed the king of his illness, and Abgar became a Christian and allowed the apostle to preach to the people of Edessa.

The significance of this story is that Thaddeus was none other than the apostle Addai, long honoured by the Church of the East as the first man to preach Christianity in the Parthian Empire. Addai is simply the Syriac version of the Greek name Thaddeus. Is there, then, a grain of truth in the tradition that the evangelisation of Persia was pursued from Edessa by Addai, one of the seventy apostles? It is certainly likely that Edessa was the springboard for Christian missionary activity in the Parthian Empire, if for no other reason than that the form of Syriac spoken and written by Persian Christians during the Sasanian period was the dialect of Edessa. But the story of the conversion of Abgar V by Addai is a demonstrable legend. Some scholars have attributed its invention to Abgar VIII, who ruled Edessa in the early years of the third century. Abgar VIII, they argued, was the first king of Edessa to convert to Christianity, and the supposed correspondence between Jesus and Abgar V was forged on his orders to provide his dynasty with a respectable Christian pedigree. Unfortunately, the evidence for Abgar VIII's alleged Christianity is very weak, and it seems far more likely that he, like all his predecessors, was a pagan. There are also good grounds for believing that the tradition of Abgar V's conversion by Addai did not yet exist at this period. Ephrem the Syrian, who lived in Edessa in the first quarter of the fourth century, did not mention Addai, and his silence is most significant.

It is scarcely conceivable that the first great writer in the Syriac Christian literary tradition should have overlooked so important a figure had he been known at Edessa in his time. Rather, the story of the conversion of Abgar V seems to have been invented later in the fourth century by a Christian group in Edessa to bolster their authority in their struggles against the Manicheans.

The Christians of Edessa probably also invented Addai, Mari and Thomas. Around the middle of the third century a charismatic Persian visionary named Mani, a self-styled 'apostle of Jesus Christ', preached an alluring new doctrine of salvation that found eager acceptance in both the Roman and Persian Empires. Mani was eventually arrested by the Persian authorities and died in prison in 277, and his followers were persecuted and scattered. In its time, Manicheism offered keen competition to Christianity, and Christian bishops had good cause to fear its influence. Scholars have long noticed the coincidence that three of Mani's foremost disciples were called Addai, Mari and Thomas. It used to be believed that Mani named his followers after their Christian counterparts, the apostles of Mesopotamia, Babylonia and India. There is good reason to believe that exactly the reverse happened. The Manicheans were the first to bear these hallowed names, and third- and fourth-century clerics in Edessa, alarmed at the name recognition these detested pioneers enjoyed both in the Roman Empire and Persia, appropriated the reputations of the three Manichean disciples and relaunched them as Christian missionaries.

They started with Thomas, one of the twelve apostles. Thomas, famously, had refused to believe in Christ's resurrection until he had placed his hand in the side of the risen Lord. Jesus is said to have rebuked him with the words, 'You have believed because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen, but yet believe (John 20:29).' Aptly, the myth-makers despatched Doubting Thomas to remote India, where he preached among 'those who had not seen'. Knowing that a good forgery required plausible corroborative detail, they credited him with the conversion of the Indian king Gundophar, a genuine historical figure whose coins have survived. It would be nice if there were a basis of truth for the story of Gundophar's conversion, but the Indian Christians who met the Alexandrian scholar Pantaenus when he visited their country shortly before the end of the second century knew nothing of Saint Thomas, and their ignorance is surely decisive. The Thomas legend was only invented in the third century, in Edessa. The *Acts of Thomas*, a hagiographical account of the adventures of Thomas in India, popularised the legend, and won it believers not only in India but also in Fars, on the sea route to India. As one of the original twelve disciples, Thomas was a far more attractive founding father than the second-generation apostles Addai and Mari, and it is not hard to see why the Christians of Fars and India

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eagerly embraced the Thomas legend as soon as it developed. By the late fourth century Edessa claimed to possess the bones of Thomas, which had supposedly been returned to Mesopotamia after the saint's death near Madras at the hands of angry pagans. This was a myth too far. Indian Christians refused to acquiesce in the loss of their patron saint, and before long were asserting that the body of Thomas had remained in India. It is not clear when the 'tomb of Saint Thomas' at Meliapur first became a site of pilgrimage, but it may well have become a focus for Christian devotion well before the Arab conquest.

The development of the Church of the East's legends of apostolic foundation can be traced most clearly in the case of Addai. The process of fabrication began in fourth-century Edessa, whose inventive clergy forged the Syriac 'document' in the Edessa archives which had taken in Eusebius. In the early decades of the fifth century, perhaps around 430, an anonymous writer in Edessa published the *Teaching of the Apostle Addai* (often referred to as the *Doctrina Addai*), an account of the Addai legend which clearly derives from the same spurious source. The *Doctrina Addai*, written for a Roman audience, gave Addai the credit for the evangelisation of Roman Edessa, but significantly did not send him into Persia. His association with the Church of the East only came later. In the fifth and sixth centuries Addai was known to Persian Christians as the apostle of Edessa, but even as late as the seventh century no reputable Nestorian writer was yet suggesting that he had ever preached in Persia. But Addai was a catch, and the temptation to claim him as a founding father eventually proved irresistible. His appeal began to crystallise in the middle of the sixth century. The author of the fictitious *Acts of Mari*, writing around 560, found an ingenious way of associating Addai with the Church of the East. He had sufficient respect for the tradition to keep Addai in Edessa, where he had always been, but he also claimed that the apostle had commissioned his disciple Mari to preach the Gospel in the Parthian Empire. From there, it was only a short step to giving Addai a direct role in the evangelisation of Persia. The author of the notorious *Chronicle of Erbil*, probably also writing in the middle decades of the sixth century, boldly claimed Addai as the apostle of Beth Zabdai and Adiabene and the founder of the diocese of Erbil. Once Addai was on Persian soil, the pious monks who invented the early history of the Church of the East were free to give full rein to their fertile imaginations. The geographical scope of Addai's apostolate gradually broadened, and by the twelfth century the Nestorian writer Mari could confidently assert that Addai had preached not only in Erbil, but also in Mosul (a town which did not exist in the first Christian century) and in Beth Garmai.

The legends of these early apostles, although without any historical truth, are nevertheless important evidence for the way men thought later, and illustrate the

early development of regionalism in the Church of the East. The Christians of Adiabene, who revered the apostle Addai as the founder of their Church, felt that they had more in common with their counterparts in Roman Edessa, the scene of Addai's most famous exploit, than with the Christians of Babylonia, whose Church had supposedly been founded by Mari. Similar regional loyalties were felt by the followers of Addai's disciple Aggai in Beth Huzaye and, most intensely of all, by the Christians of Fars and India, whose Church claimed descent from Thomas, one of the original twelve disciples. At first these regional loyalties mattered little. Later on, however, when the Christians of Seleucia-Ctesiphon asserted their claim to the leadership of the Persian Church, they became more important.

The Church of the East in the Third Century. In 224 the Parthian Empire was overthrown in a revolution led by Ardashir I, the founding father of the Sasanian dynasty. The Sasanians believed that they were recreating the old Achaemenid kingdom of Persia that had been destroyed by Alexander the Great, and this proud Persian dynasty, which exalted Zoroastrianism as the state religion, soon found itself at war with Rome. The conquests of Ardashir's son Shapur I in the 250s yielded a large number of Roman prisoners, who were deported to Persia and resettled in Beth Aramaye, Maishan, Beth Huzaye and Fars. This policy, regarded as a merciful alternative to massacre, unwittingly aided the growth of Christianity in Persia. Some deportees were settled in the towns 'founded' by Shapur's father: Veh Ardashir in Beth Aramaye, a prestige capital on the Tigris built alongside the earlier foundations of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, and Rev Ardashir in Fars. Others were settled in three new towns built especially for them by Shapur: Rima in Maishan, 'Ukbara on the middle Tigris, and Beth Lapat in Beth Huzaye. Beth Lapat, where the prisoners taken at Antioch were resettled, was pointedly given the Persian name Veh az Andiokh Shapur, 'Shapur's city, better than Antioch'. The city is better known today as Jundishapur, the form in which this name was transmitted to the Arabs. Shapur seems to have intended that Jundishapur should become a success. According to Bar Hebraeus 'he settled his Roman wife there, and she was accompanied by distinguished Greek physicians, who introduced the medical system of Hippocrates into the East'. By the fifth century Jundishapur was renowned for the quality of its medical school and the skill of its doctors. Many of these doctors were Christians, and some of them crowned their careers by becoming personal physicians at the royal court. As they had the king's ear, they could sometimes influence his attitude towards his Christian subjects.

Although the great majority of the prisoners were pagans, and took the worship of the Roman gods with them into captivity, a significant proportion were

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Christians, and these were a welcome windfall for the Persian Church. Although they had been uprooted from their homes, life for the Christian deportees in Persia was safer than it was in the Roman Empire, where the emperor Valerian had been persecuting the Christians of the eastern provinces. Nevertheless, it took several generations for the descendants of these Christians to be fully assimilated into the Church of the East, and the process was not easy. The Roman Christians were used to a different form of service, and most of them spoke Greek rather than Syriac. For some years language was a real barrier, and the available evidence suggests that the prisoners of war at first organised themselves into a Roman Church in exile. The Christians settled in Jundishapur are said to have been accompanied by the bishop Demetrius of Antioch, who died of sorrow shortly after reaching his new home. They did not ask the Persian Church for a replacement for Demetrius, but instead elected one of their own number, Ardaq, as their new bishop. Rima had an elderly bishop in 315 named Andrew, a name rarely found among the Persians but common enough in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. Finally, according to the *Chronicle of Seert*, two churches were founded in Rev Ardashir, one called the 'church of the Romans' where services were held in Greek, and the other the 'church of the Kirmanians' where Syriac was used. The 'Kirmanians' were presumably a community of Christian traders from Kirman who were resident in Rev Ardashir.

There was a short persecution of Christians in Persia during the reign of Bahram II (276–93). The persecution was primarily directed against the hated Manicheans, but Bahram was at first unable to distinguish between the beliefs of the Christians and those of the Manicheans. A number of Christians, including Bahram's Roman wife Candida, were killed before he was convinced that the Christians did not subscribe to the Manichean heresies. The antagonisms of this period are recorded in the celebrated Ka'ba-yi Zardusht inscription of c.285, in which the chief magus Kartir boasted that he had placed Zoroastrianism beyond challenge in Persia by 'striking down' the Jews, the Buddhists, the Brahmins, the Manicheans, the *Nasraye* and the *Kristiyan*. The *Nasraye* ('Nazarenes') were evidently the Syriac-speaking native Christians, and the *Kristiyan* the Greek-speaking Christians of the deportations.

The Persian Church at this period had no central organisation. Its individual bishops ruled their dioceses much as they pleased, restrained only by public opinion and the dictates of their own consciences. By the early decades of the fourth century, however, the leadership of the Church had been assumed by the bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Like nearly all such episodes in the history of the Church of the East, the process was acrimonious. Until the middle of the third century the Christians of Seleucia-Ctesiphon had been without a bishop

of their own, doubtless due to the hostility of the Zoroastrians towards an organised Christian presence in the Persian capital. They were visited occasionally by the bishops of Erbil and Susa. A separate diocese for the capital was founded around 280, when the priest Papa bar Aggai was consecrated by the bishops Aha d'Abuh of Erbil and Hai-Beël of Susa as the first bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Although the new diocese had an unimpressive pedigree, Papa attempted to assert its primacy over the other Persian dioceses at a synod held at Seleucia in 315. He had persuasive arguments on his side. In the Roman Empire the bishops of the smaller towns were beginning to accept the leadership of the archbishops of the provincial capitals, and it made sense to duplicate these arrangements in Persia. The Persian Church would also benefit if it had a single, generally-accepted leader, living in the capital, who could represent the interests of the entire Christian community to the civil power. Papa might have won a degree of sympathy for his position had he prepared the ground carefully before making such a contentious proposal, but he attempted to bludgeon the synod into compliance with his wishes through sheer force of personality.

As a result, Papa's claims to primacy were resisted strenuously by the bishops of many of the older Persian dioceses. The opposition was led by the bishops Yahballaha of Karka d'Beth Slokh (modern Kirkuk) and Milas of Susa, and according to the *Chronicle of Seert* they were supported by most of the bishops of Beth Aramaye, Beth Huzaye and Maishan. Shem'on bar Sabba'e, Papa's archdeacon, also declared his opposition. According to the traditional accounts of the synod of 315, there was a stormy confrontation between Papa and his opponents which ended in Papa's deposition and Shem'on bar Sabba'e's appointment in his place. In a heated exchange with Milas of Susa, Papa was challenged to accept the judgement of scripture. To make his point, Milas flourished a copy of the Gospels. Papa furiously struck the book and shouted 'Speak then, Gospel, if you have anything to say!' No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he suffered a stroke that permanently paralysed his right arm. After his recovery, he is said to have appealed for support from the bishop of Edessa, just across the border in the Roman Empire, and the 'Westerners' proposed a compromise. The primacy of the diocese of Seleucia-Ctesiphon would be recognised and Papa would be reinstated, but with Shem'on bar Sabba'e as his colleague and eventual successor. Shem'on's father, a close friend of the Persian king, closed with this deal, and the opposition to Papa crumbled away. There is no need to doubt that there was an ill-tempered confrontation in Seleucia-Ctesiphon between Papa and his opponents, but Papa's supposed appeal to the bishop of Edessa, which is not mentioned in any Roman source, was invented in the sixth century by the unpopular patriarch Joseph (552–67) to justify his contention that patriarchs could not be lawfully deposed by their bishops.

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Papa was recognised not as a patriarch, nor even as an archbishop, but merely as the leading bishop of the Persian Church. It could scarcely have been otherwise, as the Church in the Roman Empire was not yet organised into the five classic patriarchates that existed in Justinian's day. Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch only became patriarchates in 381 and Jerusalem had to wait until 451 for recognition. Nevertheless, the synod of 315 marked a decisive step forward in the self-definition of the Church of the East. The bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was henceforth recognised by most Persian bishops as the head of their Church, and his successors have maintained that position through good times and bad to the present day. Many of them, like Papa, have had difficulty in distinguishing between the interests of the Church and their own interests, and many too have relished confrontation when a more tactful approach might have been more successful. Throughout its history the Church of the East has been plagued by disputes and schisms, and they too are part of Papa's legacy. If Papa's chief claim to fame today is that he established the primacy of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, he should also be remembered for inaugurating a long and damaging tradition of intemperate, rancorous disputation.

The Persecution of Shapur II. In 338, during the long reign of the Persian king Shapur II (309–79), war again broke out between Persia and the Roman Empire, now officially Christian. The war was provoked by Roman interference in Persia's internal affairs. The conversion of Constantine and the subsequent triumph of Christianity both in the Roman Empire and in the Persian client state of Armenia fundamentally changed the relationship between the Persian kings and the Roman emperors. Not only did the Romans declare their support for the Christian dynasty of Armenia, but they also began to take an uncomfortable interest in the welfare of the Christian minority in Persia itself. Constantine is said to have written a patronising letter to the young Shapur, urging him to tolerate Persia's growing Christian community. This flagrant interference by the Romans led to war between the two empires in 338, and sparked a severe persecution of the Christian minority in Persia. In the initial campaign around Nisibis the Persian army suffered a humiliating reverse, attributed by the Christians to the prayers of the city's bishop Ya'qob. Shapur's Zoroastrian advisers, supported by the leaders of the Jews, argued that the loyalty of the Christians could not be counted upon in this crisis, and persuaded the king to enforce Zoroastrianism throughout the Sasanian Empire. Shortly after the outbreak of war, perhaps partly in response to his defeat at Nisibis, Shapur ordered a persecution of the Christians which continued with greater or lesser severity until the war with Rome came to an end in 363.

A reaction of this kind was almost inevitable in the circumstances. In theory, Shapur had no reason to worry about the loyalty of Persia's Christians. Both in Persia and in the Roman Empire, the 'people of Christ' were taught that it was their duty to obey their rulers and to pray for them. This duty held good even during periods of persecution. During the great Roman persecutions of the third century, many Christians in the Roman Empire had defied the authorities and suffered martyrdom rather than deny their faith, but they had never actively rebelled against their persecutors. Shapur should therefore have been able to count on the loyalty of his Christian subjects, even in a war against a Christian power. Most Persian Christians did indeed want to be both Christians and loyal subjects of the Persian king, as the recorded statements of many of the Persian martyrs demonstrate. But a small minority sympathised with the enemy, and prayed for a Roman victory because they believed that it would advance the cause of Christianity in Persia. Aphrahat, the earliest author of the Church of the East whose works have survived, spoke for this minority. He believed that the Christians had replaced the Jews as God's chosen people. They had become a new 'nation out of the nations' (*'amma d'men 'amme*). Regardless of whether they lived under Roman or Persian rule, their primary loyalty should be to one another. In one of his writings, circulated secretly to members of this Persian fifth column and only later published, Aphrahat prophesied defeat for Shapur's army. Shapur, he said, was a wicked and proud man, and victory would go to the army of the Romans, as it was led by the 'hero' Christ. Most of Aphrahat's zealots realised that the Romans were powerless to help them, and did nothing to arouse the suspicions of the authorities, but some did indeed act as spies for the Romans, and their treason doubtless inflamed popular feeling against the rest.

The terrors of Shapur's persecution were remembered ever afterwards by the Persian Church as the 'forty-year persecution'. The *Acts of the Persian Martyrs*, a collection of slightly later testimonies by Christian eyewitnesses who were determined to preserve the memory of the dead, demonstrate that the persecution was both widespread and carefully targeted. Many of the Christians who were arrested were savagely tortured to encourage them to deny their faith. If they remained obdurate, they were normally either beheaded, stoned or crucified. In some cases, fouler means were used, notably the torture of the 'iron comb', in which the victim was flayed alive. Some Christians were bound and thrown into pits to be eaten alive by rats and other vermin. On one occasion, Christians were trampled to death by elephants in a mass execution. Many of the executions took place at the royal residences of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Beth Lapat and Karka d'Ledan, but there were other martyrdoms as far afield as Rai, a little to the south of modern Teheran. Christians were also executed in the countryside, in the small Christian villages of Adiabene and Beth Garmai.

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At first, the Christians were attacked indiscriminately. So many Christians were killed at Karka d'Beth Slokh that the authorities ran out of swords and executioners. The killing did not produce recantations. Instead, some of the Christian witnesses became frenzied by the scenes of butchery. Seeing their friends or neighbours dragged off for execution, they volunteered for the crown of martyrdom themselves. Shapur recoiled from the mass slaughter of Christians, and changed his policy. The Persians now struck primarily at converts from Zoroastrianism and—in the hope that ordinary Christians would lapse if they were deprived of their leaders—at bishops, priests and deacons. Shem'on bar Sabba'e, who had succeeded Papa as bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 329, was one of the first victims of these new tactics. In 344 he was rounded up along with scores of Christian priests and deacons, and taken into Shapur's presence at Karka d'Ledan in Beth Huzaye. There, the Christians were ordered to worship the sun. Shem'on's father was a personal friend of Shapur, and Shapur doubtless hoped that Shem'on would recant. He did not, and nor did the other Christians. One hundred and two priests were killed in front of Shem'on's eyes, as he exhorted them to be true to their faith. One old man trembled with terror as his fate approached, and Shem'on stiffened his courage: 'Don't be afraid, my brother. Close your eyes, and let the surgeon's knife do its work.' After all his companions had been killed, Shem'on was himself beheaded in the king's presence. In the years that followed several other bishops, and hundreds of priests and deacons, met a similar fate.

Shem'on was succeeded as bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon by his archdeacon and nephew Shahdost of Beth Garmai, who was consecrated secretly in a house in Seleucia. Shahdost's reign lasted a little over a year. He was eventually arrested by the authorities with over a hundred fellow-Christians, imprisoned and tortured for five months, and finally brought into Shapur's presence. The Persian king reproached the primate for his insolence. 'I have already killed Shem'on, the leader of the Christians, and several of his bishops. How dare you take his place at the head of a people I detest?' He then threatened to kill every Christian in Persia unless their new leader apostasised. Shahdost refused to compromise. 'So long as there is water in the sea, there will be Christians. The more you kill, the more they will multiply.' He was returned to his prison cell, and executed three months later. He was succeeded by another of Shem'on's nephews, Barba'shmin of Beth Garmai, who reigned until 346. Barba'shmin was also arrested, imprisoned for a year, and beheaded in Shapur's presence at Karka d'Ledan. With three bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon captured and executed one after another, the Persian Church remained without a head for the next four decades. At the same time, the Persian authorities were also busy in Adiabene. Two bishops of Erbil were killed in quick succession, Yohannan in 343 and Abraham in 345.

In 362, after more than twenty years of indecisive fighting between the Romans and the Persians, the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate attempted to win a decisive victory by launching a major invasion of Persian territory. His expedition failed disastrously. The Roman army was surrounded and harassed by Persian cavalry, Julian himself was killed, and in 363 his successor Jovian was forced to sue for peace with Persia. The price for the evacuation of the remnants of the Roman army from Persian territory was the cession of Nisibis and five adjacent rural districts. The war with Rome had ended in a satisfying Persian victory, and Shapur significantly modified his attitude towards the Christians. Although Christians were still harried by the Persian authorities as enemies of Zoroastrianism until Shapur's death in 379—one Christian bishop was put to death as late as 378—they could now no longer be accused of treason. The Persian state ceased actively to persecute its Christian minority, and the number of Christian martyrs dwindled sharply after 363. Bloodied but unbowed, the battered Persian Church began to take stock of its losses. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, 160,000 Christians had been killed in the cities, and a further 30,000 in 'the country of Iraq'. These figures are absurdly high, and modern scholars are more inclined to accept the testimony of the Greek historian Sozomen, who stated that around 16,000 Christians had been killed for their faith. Even at this lower figure, this was still an enormous number of martyrs. There would be other persecutions under the Sasanians, but not for such a long period nor on so large a scale. The Church of the East had escaped the great persecutions of the third century in the Roman Empire. It had now come of age. Faced with the terrors of Shapur's persecution, many Persian Christians had denied their faith, as their Roman counterparts had done before them, but many others had triumphantly affirmed it in their own blood. The Church of the East could now match the Roman Churches with its own inspiring narrative of Christian heroism and steadfastness.

The Church of the East and the Western Churches. The history of the Church of the East during the half-century that followed the peace between Rome and Persia is extremely obscure. The dramatic events of Shapur's persecution were eagerly recorded by the earliest historians of the Persian Church, but the subsequent return to normality did not interest them. So scanty are the sources for this period that even the succession of the bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon is uncertain. There is broad agreement that, after a long interval, Barba'shmin was succeeded first by Tomarsa of Kashkar, who sat for eight years, and then by Qayyoma (395–9), but the sources disagree wildly on the dating of Tomarsa's reign. According to Bar Hebraeus, Tomarsa was consecrated in 363, as soon as the war with Rome came to an end. According to the Nestorian writers, however, he was appointed more

than twenty years later, during the reign of Shapur III (383–8) or his successor Bahram IV (388–99). This seems far more likely, as Christians continued to be persecuted sporadically until the death of Shapur II in 379, and it would have been difficult for a new leader to be consecrated in such circumstances. Bahram IV, who concluded a further peace treaty with the Romans, relaxed the pressure on the Christians, and Tomarsa's eight-year episcopate should probably be placed during his reign, from 388 to 395. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, Tomarsa visited the shattered Christian communities of Persia, rebuilt some of the churches that had been destroyed in the persecution of Shapur, and consecrated bishops. He is also said to have encouraged Christians to marry and have children, to repair the losses of the persecution. The Church of the East evidently recovered strongly in the last decade of the fourth century, as in 410 many of its dioceses were contested by more than one bishop.

Qayyoma, an old man who had accepted the leadership of the Church purely as a stop-gap, resigned shortly after his appointment in favour of Isaac (399–410), a relative of Tomarsa. Isaac led the Church of the East until 410, and at the end of his reign convened a synod in Seleucia-Ctesiphon that marked another important step in the self-definition of the Church of the East. The synod was brokered by the Roman bishop Marutha of Martyropolis, Rome's ambassador to Persia, who had endeared himself to the Persian Christians by ensuring that the thousands of victims of Shapur's terrible persecution were remembered and honoured in the West. He had listed and published the names of some of the Persian martyrs, and had also collected the bones of many of the dead and buried them in Christian territory, at a site named Martyropolis ('city of martyrs') in the Roman border province of Sophanene. Martyropolis, normally referred to by Syriac-speaking Christians by its Syriac name Maiperqat, soon became a thriving town, and Marutha was appointed its first bishop. Now, in 410, he was able to persuade the Persian king Yazdgird I (399–420) that it was in his interest to establish the Church of the East as a recognised minority religion in Persia. For more than eighty years the condition of the Christians in Persia had been a source of friction between Rome and Persia. Yazdgird wanted peaceful relations with the Roman Empire, and Marutha convinced him that legitimising the status of Christians in Persia would remove one of the major obstacles. The synod of Isaac was therefore officially held under Yazdgird's presidency, and prayers were offered by the assembled bishops for the king's long life. The price demanded by Marutha for his intervention was the adherence by the Church of the East to the acts of the Council of Nicaea in 325, its subscription to the Nicene Creed, and the realignment of a number of its festivals so that they were celebrated on the same days as in the Roman Empire. It was too much to expect the Persian

bishops to give such proofs of their orthodoxy and ecumenical spirit without grumbling. They signed up to the propositions of the Nicene Creed, but refused to accept the familiar version used everywhere else in the Christian world, every clause of which had been vetted by eminent theologians and drafted by gifted stylists. Instead, they insisted on modifying a poorly-written local creed so that it covered roughly the same ground. Marutha, surely, looked down his nose at such parochialism.

The most important achievement of the synod of 410 was that it brought some much-needed order and discipline into the ecclesiastical administration of the Church of the East. On several occasions during Shapur's war with Rome, Christian communities from the Roman border provinces had been deported to Persia by the victorious Persian armies, and as a result many Persian dioceses now had two bishops, one a Persian and the other a Greek-speaking Roman deportee. The bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was grudgingly accepted as the head of the Church, but his authority over his fellow-bishops was limited. As yet the Church had no archbishops, let alone a patriarch, and the frequent disputes over precedence between individual bishops all landed on the desk of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. They ordered these things far better in Rome. Since 381 the Church in the Roman Empire had been divided into four patriarchates (Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria), and under each patriarch were a number of metropolitans or archbishops. Although each bishop was responsible for his own diocese, the metropolitan was recognised as the province's primate. Marutha was able to persuade the Persian bishops to organise the Church of the East along roughly similar lines. Because of the sensitivities of the Persian metropolitans, it was not yet possible for the metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to call himself a patriarch. Instead, in a tactful nod to the time-honoured notion that he was merely *primus inter pares*, he was styled 'grand metropolitan'. In practice, however, the introduction of the metropolitan system in 410 marked a decisive step in the transformation of the Persian Church into a Roman-style patriarchate.

In line with the Roman system, most of the Mesopotamian dioceses of the Church of the East were grouped into five geographically-based provinces (in order of precedence, Beth Huzaye, Nisibis, Maishan, Adiabene and Beth Garmai), each headed by a metropolitan bishop with jurisdiction over several suffragan bishops. Nisibis, which had only been Persian for half a century, was given the second rank among the five metropolitan provinces, probably because it had a far larger Christian population in 410 than any of its rivals. The assembled bishops also agreed that this arrangement would gradually be extended beyond Mesopotamia, to the dioceses in Persia itself, and by 415 Fars had also been recognised as a metropolitan province. The bishops of Beth Aramaye, who were particularly

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touchy about their status, asked to be placed under the direct jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon; and although in 410 Isaac agreed only to a privileged status for the diocese of Kashkar, a 'patriarchal' province for Beth Aramaye was established in 420. The synod also declared that each diocese should have only one bishop and that each bishop should be consecrated by three other bishops. It did its best to remove bishops who were surplus to requirements. Where a diocese was disputed between two bishops, it sought wherever possible to confirm one man and persuade his rival to stand down. Some bishops refused to go back to being priests, and the synod placated them by shunting them into *ad personam* dioceses which were suppressed on their deaths.

The historian can only guess at the tense negotiations that must have taken place behind the scenes to craft this imposing edifice. It would be interesting to know, for example, how the bishops of Erbil and Prath d'Maishan were persuaded to admit the precedence of upstart Nisibis. The administrators were not always able to get their way, and the recognition by the synod of half a dozen ephemeral dioceses represented a triumph of compromise over efficiency. But whether they knew it or not, the patriarch Isaac and his bishops had built to last. The metropolitan system established at the synod of Isaac survived unchanged in its essentials for at least nine hundred years, until it broke down at an unknown date between 1318 and 1552, during the disorders that attended the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire and the rise of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties. Although the number of metropolitan provinces increased as the Church's horizons expanded, and although some suffragan dioceses within the original six provinces lapsed and others took their place, nearly all the ecclesiastical provinces created or recognised in 410, together with a good number of their suffragan dioceses, were still in existence at the end of the thirteenth century.

The acts of the synod of Isaac were ratified by Yazdgird I, who thereby recognised the Church of the East as a legitimate institution within the Sasanian state. Persia's Christians were now no longer a despised heretical sect, subject to arbitrary persecution whenever it suited the magi, but a recognised minority community. Henceforth they were responsible for their own good order, but were answerable to the civil authorities through the 'grand metropolitan' of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon thus became civil administrators as well as religious leaders. Perhaps their most important role was to represent the interests of Persia's Christians at court, and to advise the king on Christian affairs. Of course, this exalted status only came at a price. The Persian kings reserved the right to confirm the Christians' choice of leader. This oversight could be irksome at times, but it could also be a very useful resource. During the next two centuries the Christians were sometimes forced to accept one of the

king's nominees, but there were also occasions when they appealed to the king to rid them of an unpopular patriarch.

Isaac died shortly after the synod broke up, and was succeeded by Ahai (410–14), who led the Church for only four years and was chiefly remembered for his ascetic lifestyle and his pious determination to commemorate the sufferings of the Persian Christians martyred under Shapur II. 'Before he assumed his patriarchal responsibilities,' wrote Mari, 'he made a pilgrimage to see the monuments of the martyrs who had suffered for Christ under Shapur, and wrote their acts, and edited an entire volume on their deeds and why each one was martyred.' It is almost certainly due to Ahai's industry that the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs*, a prime source of information on the Church of the East in the fourth century, have survived. Ahai was succeeded by Yahballaha I (415–20), who convened a synod in 420 at which the Roman Church was again represented, this time by the bishop Acacius of Amid. The synod spent much of its time wrangling over the internal administration of the Persian Church. Several of the bishops forced out in 410 had refused to go quietly, and the synod attempted to resolve the disputes that had since arisen. At the request of Acacius, the Persian bishops also ratified *en bloc* the acts of several Roman regional synods held since 325, which had proscribed the teachings of the Novatianists, the Photians, the Quartodecimans and the Montanists, and several more obscure heresies besides. Ten years earlier, at the synod of Isaac, the assembled bishops had pored over the acts of the ecumenical Council of Nicaea and had enacted only those canons which were relevant to their own circumstances. The acts of the regional synods which they now adopted had resolved problems the Persian Church had never had to face, and condemned heresies that had never taken root in Persia. It would have taken far too long to extract the useful core from these acts, and they were therefore ratified without discussion by the Persian bishops and subsequently ignored. The important thing was that the Church of the East had demonstrated that it was abreast of the latest ecclesiastical developments.

Yahballaha I died in 420 and was succeeded by Ma'na, metropolitan of Fars. Ma'na, who was born in Fars, was elected under pressure from Yazdgird, who doubtless preferred to see the Sasanian Church run by a Persian instead of a Syrian. His reign was short and unhappy, and was marked by a brief and half-hearted persecution. Soon after his election the sacred flame in a Zoroastrian fire temple was extinguished by a Christian named Narsai. Narsai was tried by the magi at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and was executed after refusing to rekindle the flame. Shortly afterwards a Zoroastrian fire temple in Susa was destroyed by the city's Christians, because it stood next door to a Christian church. Again, this affront to the dominant religion in Persia could not go unpunished, and the bishop 'Abda of

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Susa was held responsible for the outrage. 'Abda made no attempt to compromise with the authorities, and was executed after refusing to rebuild the temple. Yazdgird complained to Ma'na about the indiscipline of the Christians, and was told that kings could levy taxes on their subjects but could not dictate their religious beliefs. For this insolent answer he was deposed from his office and sent back to Fars in disgrace. On the news that he was conducting himself there as though he was still patriarch, Yazdgird had him imprisoned. He died shortly afterwards, and may have been released on the king's orders before his death. Yazdgird ordered a brief persecution of the Christians immediately after the outrage at Susa, but it did not last long, and did little harm to the Church of the East. The king did not seriously enforce his order, and it was rescinded on his death only months afterwards, apparently on the intervention of the Armenian patriarch Isaac.

Yazdgird was succeeded by his son Bahram V (420–38), who had won the throne against the opposition of many Persian nobles, with the help of his father's chief minister Mihrnarseh. Shortly after his accession, Bahram placed another Persian at the head of the Church of the East. The new patriarch, Farbokht, was bishop of the diocese of Kazrun (Bih Shapur) in Fars, and is said to have won Bahram's support with a handsome bribe and a promise that he would secretly adopt the Zoroastrian faith. His reign was short and unpopular, and after only a few months in office the bishops begged Bahram's counsellors to ask the king to depose him. Bahram complied, and Farbokht was succeeded by the patriarch Dadisho^c (421–56), who was regularly elected. According to Mari, Farbokht's name was struck from the diptychs in token of the illegality of his reign.

Several Christians who had been condemned to death during Yazdgird's last years were executed in the first one or two years of Bahram's reign. The most famous of these martyrs, Ya'qob the Dismembered, was condemned by Bahram's chief magus to suffer 'the nine deaths', a punishment reserved for apostates from Zoroastrianism. His limbs were cut off one by one and his corpse was left unburied. Other Christian victims included Mehrshapur, who was starved to death in an underground cistern, and Peroz, a notable of Beth Garmai who was beheaded in Shahrzur. Although these martyrdoms took place while Bahram was on the throne, they should really be seen as unfinished business from Yazdgird's reign. Certainly, there is little evidence that Bahram initiated a persecution of his own. He imprisoned the newly-consecrated patriarch Dadisho^c for two years, but he only did so in response to accusations of treason by a group of bishops who resented Dadisho's election. In 422, after putting down an internal rebellion, Bahram made peace with Rome, and Dadisho^c was released at the request of the Roman emperor Theodosius II. No Christians are known to have been executed in the remaining sixteen years of Bahram's reign.

Since 410 the Persian Church had been organised into several metropolitanates dependent on the 'grand metropolitan' of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. A further step was taken in 424, at a synod convened by the Persian bishops at Markabta d'Tayyaye, a town in the diocese of Hirta comfortably remote from the excitements of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Dadisho^c, who had taken shelter in a monastery after his recent imprisonment, had to be cajoled into presiding at this synod. The synod declared that the metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon should be the sole head of the Persian Church, that no ecclesiastical authority should be acknowledged above him, and that no appeal would be permitted to the Western bishops (specifically, the patriarch of Antioch and the metropolitan of Edessa). In token of his exalted status, Dadisho^c adopted the title 'catholicus' ('overlord'), thereby becoming a patriarch in all but name. The Roman bishop Acacius of Amid, who was present in Persia at the time as a guest of the king, was pointedly excluded from the synod. The synod's decisions were a reaction to Bahram's recent persecution, and were designed to rebut the suspicion that Persian Christians sympathised with the Romans. At the synod of Markabta, the Church of the East deliberately distanced itself from the Churches of the Roman Empire and stressed its autonomy as the Church of the Sasanian Empire. Bahram approved the acts of this synod, and confirmed the freedom of worship granted to the Christians in 410 by his father Yazdgird.

During the 440s, towards the end of Dadisho^c's reign, Bahram's successor Yazdgird II (438–57) launched a sporadic persecution against both the Armenian Church and the Church of the East, apparently prompted by the usual suspicions of disloyalty. The persecution in Mesopotamia was confined principally to Beth Garmai and Hulwan. The violence was greatest at Karka d'Beth Slokh, where thousands of Christians were executed in 446, including the province's metropolitan Yohannan. According to the *History of Karka d'Beth Slokh*, a Syriac account of the persecution, the executioner Tahmasgard was so impressed by the courage shown by the doomed Christians that he converted and shared their fate. The Chaldean cathedral of Mar Tahmasgard in Kirkuk is dedicated to the memory of this martyr.

The Nestorian Controversy. The growing coolness between the Roman and Persian Churches, symbolised by Dadisho^c's assertion in 424 of the autonomy of the Church of the East, was exacerbated in 428 by a theological struggle in the Roman Empire over the views of the archbishop Nestorius of Constantinople. Nestorius tried to discourage the use in the patriarchate of Constantinople of the title *Theotokos*, 'Mother of God', a term which had long been applied in the rest of the Roman Empire to the Virgin Mary, in favour of *Christotokos*, 'mother of Christ', a

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term which begged no questions. To his enemies, who seized every opportunity to misrepresent his true position, he appeared to be denying the perfect union of divinity and humanity in Christ and giving undue weight to Christ's human nature. The opposition to Nestorius was led by the pugnacious archbishop Cyril of Alexandria, who was motivated partly by genuine outrage and partly by jealousy of his rival's status as archbishop of the imperial capital. Both sides squared off at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This particular ecumenical council was even more ill-tempered than its predecessors had been. There were street battles in the narrow streets of Ephesus between Cyril's bodyguard of shaven-headed monks from the Egyptian deserts and the shiploads of sailors from the imperial fleet who supported Nestorius. Nestorius was eventually deposed and exiled to Egypt, where he died several years later, and the emperor Theodosius II ordered all his writings to be destroyed.

It is quite possible that Dadisho^c and his bishops did not hear of the deposition of Nestorius until several years after the event, and that they took little notice of the news when it did reach them. Nestorius, as the fourteenth-century Nestorian writer 'Abdisho^c of Nisibis pointed out, was a Greek, and his fate was only of passing interest to the Persian Church. This was perhaps true, but the beliefs for which Nestorius had been condemned were of very great interest to the Church of the East. The clash between Cyril and Nestorius was momentous, because the two protagonists represented two different theological trends, named respectively for their geographical centres at Alexandria and Antioch. The Alexandrians and the Antiochenes used very different language to describe the nature of Christ. The Alexandrians were miaphysites. They saw only one nature in the incarnate Christ, composed out of two (the human and divine), and believed that the presence of any duality would vitiate the full reality of the Incarnation. The Antiochenes, on the other hand, were dyophysites, in that they made a definite distinction between Christ's human and divine nature. The Antiochene christology had been developed by two eminent theologians, Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and was widely accepted by Christians in the patriarchate of Antioch. The Persian Church, which revered 'Theodore the Interpreter' and his theological views, was also Antiochene.

During the two decades that followed the condemnation of Nestorius in 431, his enemies did their best to purge his influence from the Churches of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. They were only partially successful. Although Nestorius had been disowned by most of the Syrian bishops who had once supported him, the Syriac-speaking Churches fought to preserve their Antiochene christology. The 'Nestorians', as they were inevitably called by their enemies, were led by the bishop Ibas of Edessa, while the Alexandrians were led after Cyril's

death in 444 by his archdeacon Dioscorus. Dioscorus won a short-lived victory in 449 by convening a second council at Ephesus, in which Ibas was condemned as a Nestorian and deposed. This controversial council, which was marred by violence and intimidation, was denounced by Pope Leo I as a 'robber synod'. There was an immediate reaction against Dioscorus, and in 451 a more moderate position was adopted at the Council of Chalcedon. Ibas was rehabilitated, Dioscorus was deposed, and the bishops agreed upon a compromise statement of Christ's nature which had been drafted by Leo. Leo held that Christ had two natures in one person, and this formulation has been the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy ever since. It was a formulation that leant marginally towards the Antiochene position, but gave no comfort either to Dioscorus and the extreme miaphysites or to Ibas and the extreme dyophysites. Had there been greater goodwill on both sides, it should have ended the christological controversies. It did not.

The Triumph of 'Nestorianism' in Persia. Ironically, the condemnation of Nestorius in the Roman Empire laid the foundations for the triumph of the dyophysite cause four decades later in the Persian Church. The Church of the East was not so insulated from the controversies in the Roman Empire as its spokesmen like to pretend nowadays. At this period there were no theological colleges in Iraq, and Persian priests who wished to study theology had to cross the border into Roman territory to do so. In the 430s and 440s dozens of zealous young Persian priests, including a number of future bishops, metropolitans and patriarchs, enrolled in the 'Persian School' in Edessa, a theological college which disseminated the Theodoran christology championed by Ibas. The school, as its name suggests, catered primarily for Persian Christians, not Romans. It was deliberately sited in Edessa, close to the Persian border, and although legend credits its foundation to Ephrem the Syrian, it was probably founded after Ephrem's death, in the final years of the fourth century, by Roman Christians who wished to show solidarity with their recently-persecuted brothers in the Sasanian Empire. The Persian students were already sentimentally attached to the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and did not protest when they were exposed to the strict dyophysite curriculum taught in Edessa. When Ibas was deposed in 449, some of these students left Edessa in alarm and returned to Persia. Among their number was an intense young man named Bar Sawma, who devoted the next four decades to the propagation of the Theodoran christology in Persia. He was determined that the Church of the East should become the national Church of Persia, and that it should be recognisably different from the Roman Churches. Bar Sawma was intelligent and quick-witted, but also stubborn, quarrelsome, treacherous and violent. He had no talent for compromise, and his fellow-students had

perceptively nicknamed him 'the swimmer among the reeds', a euphemism for the wild boar.

Bar Sawma settled in Nisibis, just inside Persian territory, and planned his campaign. He was obviously a man of exceptional ability, as within a few years he not only became metropolitan of Nisibis but also deputy to the city's marchwarden (*marzban*). This position, rarely ever held by a Christian, allowed him to command Persian troops under certain circumstances. It also won him the respect of the Persian king Peroz (459–84), who employed him in a number of diplomatic missions to the Romans. Secure in the royal favour, Bar Sawma founded a school in Nisibis along the lines of the famous 'School of the Persians' in Edessa, and used it to promulgate the doctrines of Theodore of Mopsuestia. In the sixth century Bar Sawma's School of Nisibis would develop into one of the most important theological colleges in the Mediterranean world; revered by its defenders as a bastion of Theodoran orthodoxy and loathed by its opponents as the cradle of Nestorianism in Persia. For better or worse, its foundation was Bar Sawma's greatest achievement.

Nevertheless, it was some time before the Church of the East adopted Theodore of Mopsuestia's christology. The patriarch Dadisho^c died in 456, and was buried in Hirta. Very little is known about the last thirty years of his reign, and it has been plausibly suggested that he remained in the Lakhmid kingdom after the synod of Markabta and governed the Church *in absentia*. Certainly, he is not known to have resided in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, as his office demanded. He was succeeded by Babowai (457–84), a convert from Zoroastrianism who disliked Bar Sawma and was anxious to remain on friendly terms with the Churches of the Roman Empire. Babowai reined in Bar Sawma whenever he could, and although he was unable to prevent the spread of dyophysitism within the Persian Church, he held back from formally endorsing the Theodoran theology. Bar Sawma soon realised that he would not achieve his aims while the patriarch still lived, and in 484 an opportunity arose to encompass his downfall. Babowai wrote an indiscreet letter to a number of Roman bishops in which he insulted the Persian king Peroz. 'God has delivered us up to an accursed sovereign', he wrote. The letter, concealed in a hollow cane, was intercepted at the frontier by Bar Sawma, who promptly denounced the patriarch to Peroz. Accused of treason, Babowai was unable to make a convincing defence and was executed at Hirta. It was the first time that a Christian patriarch had been executed since the end of Shapur's persecution over a century earlier, but as an apostate from Zoroastrianism Babowai was uniquely vulnerable. The punishment fitted the crime. He was hanged by the ring-finger that had sealed the guilty letter and flogged to death.

Immediately after Babowai's execution, while the patriarchal throne was still vacant, Bar Sawma convened a synod at Beth Lapat which widened the gulf between the Western Churches and the Church of the East. The acts of the synod have not survived, but references by later authors shed some light on its decisions. It did not, as far as is known, adopt an Antiochene christological definition, though it was clearly Antiochene in tenor. It condemned monophysitism (miaphysitism had recently been embraced as orthodoxy by the eastern patriarchates of the Roman Empire), and affirmed the theological authority of Theodore of Mopsuestia. In other areas too, Bar Sawma tried to distinguish the Persian from the Roman Church as sharply as he could. In 410 the synod of Isaac, influenced by the views of Marutha of Maiperqat, had adopted a Roman model of administration which gave the patriarch great power over his metropolitans. Bar Sawma, who was not alone in believing that the patriarch Babowai had betrayed his trust, tried to dilute this power by allowing metropolitans to be elected by the bishops of their province without reference to the patriarch. He also relaxed the canons on celibacy, permitting both bishops and priests to marry. This was a concession to Persian social mores. The Zoroastrians had long found it puzzling that Christians required their leaders to remain single, regarding the practice of celibacy as perverse and unnatural. Bar Sawma set an example by marrying Mamai, a rich and beautiful nun. According to Mari, her property would have gone to the Persian state if she had died single, and she agreed to marry Bar Sawma in order to place her wealth at the disposal of the Church.

The decisions of the synod of Beth Lapat in 484 gave the Church of the East a distinctive Persian character, and brought measurably closer the final breach with the Roman Churches. According to the hostile tradition retailed by Bar Hebraeus, Bar Sawma now used naked force to crush the remaining resistance to dyophysitism in Persia. Shortly after the execution of Babowai he told Peroz that it would be to his political advantage if the Church of the East distinguished itself from the Churches of the Roman Empire by adopting the hated 'Nestorian' christology. The next time Rome and Persia went to war, Persian Christians would have no divided loyalties. This was an argument that made perfect sense to Peroz. With the king's blessing, Bar Sawma assembled a force of Persian soldiers at Seleucia-Ctesiphon and led them on a bloodstained *dragonnade* through Beth Garmai, Adiabene and Beth Nuhadra. Everywhere he went, the Christians were ordered to accept the definitions agreed at the synod of Beth Lapat. Some of his hearers submitted readily, while others refused and were killed on the spot. In two places only was resistance successful. The people of Tagrit refused Bar Sawma entrance to the town and also threatened to denounce his terrorism to Peroz. Uncertain how far the king would back him in the face of such determined

opposition, Bar Sawma withdrew and headed for Erbil in search of easier prey. On the news of his approach the metropolitan Bar Sahda of Adiabene took refuge in the monastery of Mar Mattai in the Mosul plain. Bar Sawma surrounded the monastery, captured the metropolitan and twelve loyal monks and imprisoned them in chains in Nibisis while he purged Adiabene and Beth Nuhadra of heresy. The Christians of Adiabene proved more stubborn than Bar Sawma expected, and he had to kill ninety priests and hundreds of villagers during his progress northwards. He next traversed Beth Nuhadra, scattering the orthodox before him, and was hoping to crown his triumph by harrying Armenia. Here, however, he was again unsuccessful. He was warned off by the Armenian satraps, who threatened to kill him if he entered their territory. As at Tagrit, Bar Sawma bent before open resistance. Abandoning any hope of coercing the Armenians, he returned to Nisibis where he killed the metropolitan Bar Sahda and his disciples. Although by far the most eminent victim of Bar Sawma, Bar Sahda was by no means the only man to die for orthodoxy. According to Bar Hebraeus, a total of 7,700 Christians who refused to accept the 'Nestorian' definitions of Beth Lapat were killed. The true figure was probably considerably lower, but even the twelfth-century Nestorian writer Mari admitted that Bar Sawma was unable to enforce his will without bloodshed.

At this point events unexpectedly moved against Bar Sawma. The Persian king Peroz died in 484, and his successor Balash (484–8) immediately appointed a successor to Babowai. Passing over Bar Sawma as too incendiary, he chose a moderate churchman, Acacius (485–96), whom he encouraged to bring Bar Sawma to heel. Bar Sawma, who could count on the support of several metropolitans and bishops, initially refused to acknowledge the new patriarch's authority, but Acacius had both religious and civil authority on his side. Bar Sawma's support gradually waned, and eventually Acacius felt strong enough to attack him directly. In 485 he convened a synod at Beth 'Edrai in Beth Nuhadra, which nullified the acts of the synod of 484. Bar Sawma, who was present at the synod of Beth 'Edrai, acquiesced in this humiliation. He was also forced to acknowledge Acacius as patriarch and agree that the decisions taken in 484 should be reviewed by a fresh synod. On this basis the two men were reluctantly reconciled. Acacius held another synod in February 486 at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which condemned the views of 'the heretical ascetics, dressed in black'—miaphysite monks who upheld the teachings of Cyril of Alexandria—and reaffirmed the adherence of the Church of the East to the dyophysite christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia. The synod also upheld Bar Sawma's popular policies on clerical marriage. Bar Sawma was invited to this synod but made excuses for his absence, doubtless expecting that further humiliation was in store for him. In the event, he must have been pleasantly surprised by its

outcome. The synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon disappointed those who hoped that Acacius would steer the Church of the East back towards the moderate centre. For the time being the patriarch was either unable or unwilling to go further, and although he had clearly signalled his distaste for Bar Sawma's extremism, he had not replaced Bar Sawma's dyophysite confession with a formulation which the Church of the East's own moderates, let alone the Romans, could accept.

According to the Jacobite writer Bar Hebraeus, who saw no reason to pull his punches when writing about the Nestorians, the relaxed attitude of Bar Sawma and Acacius towards clerical marriage triggered a wave of immorality among the heretics:

From that time Nestorianism held sway throughout the East, and fornication became so common among the bishops, the priests, the deacons and the people that Christian babies lay on the rubbish tips and in the streets. Many of them were eaten by dogs, with the result that Acacius was forced to build houses to accommodate the orphans and to feed the women so that they might bring up the seeds of their lust.

Bar Hebraeus was certainly exaggerating, but even the Nestorian writer Mari admitted that the practice of allowing the clergy to marry had resulted in abuses. The newly-marriageable clergymen were eminently desirable husbands, and for several years were in a seller's market. Some of them evidently made the most of their opportunities by insisting on premarital sex with their prospective brides. If their partners became pregnant, and if the bishops, priests or deacons in question then changed their minds, there was little that their jilted fiancées could do about it. It is very likely that the illegitimate children resulting from these unfortunate liaisons were indeed housed in church orphanages, along with their unwanted mothers.

In 489, only three years after the synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Bar Sawma and his sympathisers received a most welcome reinforcement. Dyophysitism had been on the defensive in the Roman Empire since its condemnation at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and although the Persian School in Edessa continued to promulgate hardline dyophysite views for several decades after the death of Ibas in 457, it was closed down in 489 by order of the emperor Zeno. Just as Bar Sawma and his supporters had done forty years earlier when Ibas had been condemned at the 'robber synod' in 449, a second generation of dyophysite scholars fled across the border into Persia, where they were warmly welcomed by the metropolitan of Nisibis. For several years after the synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon Bar Sawma had been channelling his energies into building up his beloved School of Nisibis into a refuge for the scholars expelled from Edessa, but by 491 his dislike for Acacius

had again broken out into the open. This time the quarrel went much further than it had previously, as both men excommunicated each other. Shortly afterwards Acacius was sent on an embassy to Constantinople, where he was reproached by the Roman bishops for not forcing through an orthodox confession. He told his critics that he was not a Nestorian, had only intended to condemn monophysitism, and was willing to excommunicate Bar Sawma. He was challenged to do so as soon as he returned to Persia, but he was cheated by fate of a decisive confrontation. During his absence Bar Sawma had been murdered. According to Bar Hebraeus, he was mobbed in church by a gang of monks from the Tur 'Abdin—later a Jacobite stronghold—who beat him to death with the iron keys of their cells. The date of his murder (perhaps 493) is not certain, but it can only have been two or three years before the death of Acacius himself, in 496.

Acacius was succeeded by the patriarch Babai (497–502). Babai, an elderly man who had once served as the secretary to the Persian *marzban* of Beth Aramaye, enjoyed the confidence of the Persian king Kavadh I (488–531). He also had a little more freedom of action than most of his predecessors, because the Persian court was distracted by the emergence of a vigorous reform movement headed by the visionary leader Mazdak. The Mazdakites preached an alarming form of communism, and posed a far greater threat to the established order than the Christians did. While the Zoroastrians were busy exterminating this corrosive heresy, Babai took advantage of their distraction to entrench the strict Antiochene christology as the official doctrine of the Church of the East. In 497 he held a synod in Seleucia-Ctesiphon which reaffirmed the decisions of the synod of 486 and also adopted the decisions on clerical marriage taken at Bar Sawma's notorious synod of 484. Babai was clearly trying to reconcile the varying strands of opinion in the Persian Church, and he should perhaps be given credit for trying to bring his bishops together. That was not how his attempt to square the circle was seen by outsiders, however. The synod's endorsement of the 'Nestorian' christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia horrified opinion in the West. Western theologians were also appalled at its encouragement of clerical marriage. As the synod also reasserted the right of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to the title 'catholicus patriarch of the East' and declared the Church of the East entirely independent of all other Christian Churches, Babai was also seen as adding insult to injury. In 497, in the eyes of most Western Christians, the Church of the East fell into schism and heresy. Henceforth, the Persian Church would be known by all other Churches, and often by its own members, as the 'Nestorian Church'.

Babai's break with the Western Churches has cast a long shadow, and it is important to be clear about the supposed adoption of Nestorianism by the Church of the East at the synod of 497. The normative definition adopted at Chalcedon

in 451 was that Christ was incarnate in two natures (*physeis*), and constituted one hypostasis and one person (*prosopon*). The Church of the East, on the contrary, held that Christ was incarnate in two natures (*kyane*), two hypostases (*qnome*) and one person (*parsopa*). This formula, which was in some ways more logical than the Chalcedonian compromise (two natures, in the eyes of the strict dyophysites, necessarily implied two hypostases) was open to misunderstanding in Western eyes. The Syriac term *qnome* had a slightly different meaning than the Greek *hypostasis*, and was even capable of being mistranslated ‘person’ (Syriac *parsopa*, Greek *prosopon*). Since ‘two natures in two persons’ is the classic Nestorian position, it was hardly surprising that many Westerners jumped to the conclusion that the strict dyophysites were Nestorians. In fact, if full weight is given to the meaning of the Syriac terms *kyana*, *qnome* and *parsopa*, the christology of the Church of the East is perfectly orthodox. In 497 the Church of the East severed its few remaining ties with the Western Churches, guaranteeing that its enemies would place the worst possible construction on its theological position. This was a petulant and myopic response to Western criticism, though no doubt understandable in the circumstances. But despite what its enemies might say, the dyophysite christology adopted by the Church of the East at the synod of 497 remained within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. In other words, the ‘Nestorian’ Church never became Nestorian.

Nevertheless, the position adopted by the synod was provocative, ruling out any possibility of an early rapprochement with the Western Churches. It is unlikely that, so soon after Bar Sawma’s death, Babai chose voluntarily to take the Church of the East in such an unpromising direction. He must have been under great pressure from Bar Sawma’s supporters, the hardline dyophysites who had thrown their support behind the metropolitan of Nisibis at Beth Lapat thirteen years earlier. All the same, the triumph of ‘Nestorianism’ in the Church of the East was not achieved without a fight. The acts of the synod of 497 have survived, and it is clear that there was considerable opposition to Babai’s proposals. Two metropolitans, Papa of Beth Huzaye and Yazdad of Fars, refused to endorse the synod’s acts, and were threatened with deposition unless they toed the line. They were given a year to consider their position. There is no record of their eventual submission, so they presumably both lost their jobs. They were not the last defenders of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. During the troubled sixth century, as the gulf between the miaphysites and dyophysites widened, several other bishops of the Church of the East would speak out boldly against the decisions of the synod of 497. Sadly, their attempts to move the Church back into the mainstream of Christian thought were doomed to failure.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

The Patriarchate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. During the fourth and fifth centuries the Church of the East evolved from a loose confederation of independent dioceses into a Roman-style patriarchate, headed by the metropolitan of the Sasanian capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The process began in 315, when the Persian bishops conceded the primacy of the diocese of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. In 410 the Church of the East adopted a system of metropolitan provinces, and its bishops formally accepted the leadership of the metropolitans of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The title of the Persian primates changed three times during the fifth century, as they tightened their grip on power. In 410 Isaac assumed the title 'grand metropolitan and head of the bishops'. In 424 Dadisho^c adopted the style 'catholicus' ('overlord'), a term almost but not quite equivalent to 'patriarch'. His successors were less squeamish. By the end of the fifth century, though it is not clear who started the fashion, the metropolitans of Seleucia-Ctesiphon were openly calling themselves patriarchs. Their official title was 'catholicus patriarch of the East', a term with a long and proud future ahead of it. Although the patriarchs continued to be metropolitans of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, they sat neither in Greek Seleucia nor in Parthian Ctesiphon, but in the third-century Sasanian foundation of Veh Ardashir. Veh Ardashir, built on the western bank of the Tigris adjacent to Seleucia as a prestige capital, soon replaced its neighbour, and by the fifth century had also outgrown Ctesiphon on the eastern bank of the Tigris, whose position had at first sheltered it from the disruptive influence of its rival. Although most Persians referred to their capital as Veh Ardashir, Persian Christians continued to call the double city by its earlier name, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and the name stuck.

Early Dioceses. In the fourth quarter of the fourth century, in the wake of the 'forty-year persecution' of Shapur II, the Church of the East had between fifteen and twenty dioceses within the borders of the Sasanian Empire, in Beth Aramaye, Elam, Maishan, Adiabene and Beth Garmai in Mesopotamia, and in the eastern Persian province of Khorasan. Some of these dioceses had been founded by native Christians, others by deportees from the Roman Empire. A number of them were at least a century old, and it is just possible that some were founded before the Sasanian period. The dioceses of Kashkar in Beth Aramaye, Beth Lapat and Susa in Beth Huzaye, Erbil in Adiabene, Prath d'Maishan in Maishan and Karka d'Beth Slokh and Shahrgard in Beth Garmai may have been founded before the end of the second century. There is probably also truth in the persistent tradition that the diocese of Seleucia-Ctesiphon itself was a relatively late foundation, because of the hostility of the magi towards an overt Christian presence in the

Persian capital. But attempts to backdate the establishment of several dioceses to the Parthian period must be treated with great scepticism. Bishops often sought to gain prestige by exaggerating the antiquity of their dioceses, and had no scruples in claiming an apostolic foundation if they thought they could get away with it. The Adiabenean author of the sixth-century *Chronicle of Erbil* claimed that the diocese of Erbil had been founded by the apostle Addai in 104 and that there were more than 20 dioceses in 225. These claims were quite fantastic. The *Chronicle's* dioceses of Hulwan, Dailam and Shigar demonstrably did not exist as early as the third century, the 'diocese' of Beth Qatrane never existed at all, and the apostle Addai was a figment of the imagination of later revisionists. There were perhaps a dozen Persian dioceses in existence in 225, none of them more than a generation or two old.

The *Acts of the Persian Martyrs* mention seventeen dioceses within the Sasanian Empire in the second half of the fourth century: Nisibis and Beth Zabdai in Beth 'Arbaye; Erbil and Hnitha in Adiabene; Karka d'Beth Slokh, Shahrgard and Beth Niqtur in Beth Garmai; Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Kashkar and Meskene ('Ukbara) in Beth Aramaye; Prath d'Maishan and Karka d'Maishan at the head of the Persian Gulf; Beth Lapat, Susa and Hormizd Ardashir in Beth Huzaye; Rev Ardashir in Fars; and Hulwan in Media. Although some of the martyr narratives have obviously been written up, it is often possible to distinguish the fictitious embellishments from the underlying core of truth. In particular, the topographical details preserved in these hagiographical accounts are likely to be correct. In most cases, the ecclesiastical geography presented in the martyr acts prefigures that of the early fifth century, for which reliable evidence exists. Most of the dioceses mentioned in the martyr acts lay along the Tigris, echeloned between the Roman frontier and the Persian province of Fars, and are attested half a century later, when they were listed in the acts of the synod of Isaac in 410. The dioceses of Hnitha, Beth Niqtur and Meskene, however, are not mentioned in the acts of the fifth-century synods. Since the persecution of Shapur II bore heavily upon the episcopate of the Church of the East, all three dioceses may have lapsed as a result of the persecution. According to tradition, the bishop Shapur of Beth Niqtur was one of the earliest victims of Shapur's violence, while the bishop 'Aqebshma of Hnitha was put to death as late as 378, only one year before Shapur's own death; so it would not be surprising if their places were not immediately filled. The dioceses of Hnitha and Meskene were later revived, albeit more than a century after the end of the persecution, but Beth Niqtur is not again mentioned.

In purely numerical terms, the cession of Nisibis and its hinterland to Persia in 363 more than made up for the losses suffered by the Persian Church during the persecution of Shapur. After nearly fifty years of rule by Constantine and

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his Christian successors, the region probably contained more Christians than the entire Sasanian Empire; and although many of these Christians left Nisibis and resettled in Edessa and Amid, many others must have refused to leave their homes, particularly in the rural districts. The cession of the Nisibis region may well have had a greater impact on the demography of the Church of the East than the deportations of Roman Christians to Persia, and doubtless accounted for the high rank accorded to its metropolitan in 410.

The Mesopotamian Provinces. Between 410 and 424, when the acts of the synods of Isaac, Yahballaha I and Dadisho^c provide the first reliable evidence for its diocesan organisation, the Church of the East had just under fifty regular dioceses (as opposed to ephemeral *ad personam* creations). Thirty of these dioceses were in Mesopotamia, in the patriarchal province of Beth Aramaye and the five great metropolitan provinces of Beth Huzaye, Nisibis, Maishan, Adiabene and Beth Garmai. A further seventeen dioceses, in Fars, northern Arabia, Media, Tabaristan and Khorasan, were not grouped into metropolitan provinces in 410, but would be at a later date. Christians could be found in significant numbers not only in Mesopotamia and Khorasan, but also within Iran itself and on the islands off the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf, which were at this period under Sasanian control. The Saint Thomas Christians of India were also dependent on the Church of the East, and occasionally received bishops from Mesopotamia.

It was not normal for the head of an eastern Church to administer an ecclesiastical province in addition to his many other duties, but the metropolitans of Seleucia-Ctesiphon were forced to assume responsibility for a number of dioceses in Beth Aramaye. In 410, at the synod of Isaac, the dioceses of Kashkar, Zabe, Hirta, Beth Daraye and Dasqarta d'Malka (the Sasanian winter capital, Dastagird), either because of their antiquity or their proximity to the capital, demanded to be placed under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Isaac did his best to parry this request, but was forced to concede a special relationship between the dioceses of Kashkar and Seleucia-Ctesiphon. According to Canon XXI of the synod of 410, 'the first and chief seat is that of Seleucia-Ctesiphon; the bishop who occupies it is the grand metropolitan and head of all the bishops. The bishop of Kashkar is placed under the jurisdiction of this metropolitan; he is his right arm and minister, and he governs the diocese after his death.' In 420 Yahballaha I placed the dioceses of Beth Aramaye under his direct supervision. This *ad hoc* arrangement was later formalised by the creation of a 'grand eparchy' or 'province of the patriarch'. Kashkar, by tradition an apostolic foundation, was the highest-ranking diocese in the province, and its bishops enjoyed the privilege of guarding the patriarchal throne during the interregnum

between one patriarch's death and the election of his successor. The diocese of Dasqarta d'Malka is not mentioned again after 424, but bishops of the other dioceses were present at most of the fifth- and sixth-century synods.

The town of Hirta in southern Mesopotamia—more familiarly known, in its Arabic form, as al-Hira—was the capital of an Arab buffer kingdom under Sasanian control, and its bishops were also responsible for a number of important Christian communities in southern Arabia, notably in Mecca, Najran and the Yemeni city of Sana'a. Although these Christians lived beyond the boundaries of the Sasanian Empire, in the independent Arab kingdom of Himyar, they were dependent on the Church of the East. For most of the fifth century these communities do not seem to have bishops of their own, but in 486 the bishop Mushe of Hamir, a district of Najran, attended the synod of Acacius. The diocese of Hamir is not again mentioned, perhaps because it was replaced during the last century of Sasanian rule by a diocese for Najran itself. The loyalty of the Arab Christians of southern Mesopotamia to the Church of the East was precarious. The Christians of Hirta, who were widely known as the 'Ibad, the 'devotees' of Christ, resented their subordination to the 'Syrian' bishops of Kashkar, and the hostility between these two Christian communities persisted for centuries after the Arab conquest, surfacing in the form of frequent disputes over precedence. The Christians of southern Arabia, who were largely unaffected by these rivalries, lived among Jews and among pagans who were turning their back on the worship of the sun, the moon and the morning star and groping towards a form of monotheism. Little is known of the activities of these Arabian Christians, but their witness among the pagans of the Arabian peninsula may have helped pave the way for the emergence, in the seventh century, of the world's last great monotheistic religion, Islam.

The metropolitan of Beth Huzaye, who resided in the town of Beth Lapat (Jundishapur), enjoyed the right of consecrating a new patriarch. In 410 it was not possible to appoint a metropolitan for Beth Huzaye, as several bishops of Beth Lapat were competing for precedence and the synod refused to choose between them. Instead, it merely agreed that once it became possible to appoint a metropolitan, he would have jurisdiction over the dioceses of Karka d'Ledan, Hormizd Ardashir, Shushter and Susa. These dioceses had probably all been founded at least a century earlier, and their bishops were present at most of the synods of the fifth and sixth centuries. A bishop of Ispahan was present at the synod of Dadisho' in 424, and well before the ninth century the diocese of Ispahan was assigned to the province of Beth Huzaye.

The bishop of Nisibis was recognised in 410 as metropolitan of Nisibis and Beth 'Arbaye. His jurisdiction included an extensive belt of territory on

both banks of the Tigris between Nisibis and Mosul, bounded by the towns of Shigar and Balad on the south and Lake Van on the north. He initially had five suffragan dioceses: Arzun, Qardu, Beth Zabdai, Beth Rahimai and Beth Moksaye. These were the Syriac names for Arzanene, Corduene, Zabdicene, Rehimene and Moxoene, the five rural districts ceded by Rome to Persia in 363. The metropolitan diocese of Nisibis and the suffragan dioceses of Arzun, Qardu and Beth Zabdai were to enjoy a long history, but Beth Rahimai is not mentioned again and Beth Moksaye is not mentioned after 424, when its bishop Atticus (probably, from his name, a Roman) subscribed to the acts of the synod of Dadisho^c. Besides the bishop of Arzun, a bishop of 'Aoustan d'Arzun' (plausibly identified with the Ingilene district between Amid and Bidlis) also attended these two synods, and his diocese was also included in the province of Nisibis. The diocese of Aoustan d'Arzun survived into the sixth century, but is not mentioned after 554. The bishop Artashahr of Armenia, a diocese not yet assigned to a metropolitan province, subscribed to the acts of the synod of Dadisho^c in 424. By the eighth century Armenia was included in the province of Nisibis and its bishops sat at the town of Akhlāt on the northern shore of Lake Van. The Sasanian diocese of Armenia was probably also centred on Akhlāt, and seems to have been assigned to the province of Nisibis shortly after the Arab conquest. The ephemeral diocese of Mashkena d'Qurdu, whose bishop Ardaq was present at the synod of Dadisho^c in 424, should probably also be sought in the Nisibis region. A century ago the Anglican missionary William Ainger Wigram translated the name of this diocese as 'the tents of the Kurds', and suggested that its bishop was attached to a tribe of Kurdish nomads whose flocks pastured in the uplands of Kurdistan, between Lakes Van and Urmia. Some connection with the Kurds certainly seems likely, even if Wigram's translation is open to doubt.

In southern Mesopotamia, the bishop of Prath d'Maishan was recognised as metropolitan of Maishan in 410. Prath d'Maishan was a suburb of the great trading port of Spasinou Charax, one of Alexander the Great's foundations, and during the Sasanian period shared in its prosperity. Ships from Spasinou Charax sailed regularly down the Persian Gulf to fetch incense from the Arabian port of Gerrha, and some followed the Iranian coast all the way to India for the sake of the spice trade. The metropolitans of Maishan were responsible for the suffragan dioceses of Karka d'Maishan, Rima and Nahargur, and bishops from these four dioceses attended most of the synods of the fifth and sixth centuries. Christianity came early to Maishan. It was the cradle for Elchasai's baptist sect in the second century, and one of its dioceses, Rima (in Arabic, Deir Mihraq), originated in a Roman captivity. A bishop of Rima named Andrew, surely of Roman descent, was one of the Persian bishops who opposed the claims of Papa in the early

years of the fourth century. In later centuries the province of Maishan gradually declined in importance, but in the Sasanian period Christians could be found there in significant numbers. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, a fourth-century monk named ‘Abdisho’, who founded a monastery near Hirta, was a native of the village of Arfeluna—one of the very few references to Christians in Maishan from a village background—and the island of Ramath near Ubullah was a favoured retreat for Christian solitaries.

The bishop of Erbil (who sat not in Erbil itself but in the nearby town of Hazza) became metropolitan of Adiabene in 410. His jurisdiction included not only Adiabene proper, the region between the Great Zab and Lesser Zab rivers centred on Erbil, but also the Mosul and Urmia plains and the hill country of Hakkari. He was responsible for the six suffragan dioceses of Beth Nuhadra, Beth Bgash, Beth Dasen, Ramonin, Beth Mahqart and Dabarin. Bishops of the dioceses of Beth Nuhadra, Beth Bgash and Beth Dasen, which covered the modern ‘Amadiya and Hakkari regions, were present at most of the early synods, and these three dioceses continued without interruption into the thirteenth century. The dioceses of Ramonin, Beth Mahqart and Dabarin cannot be convincingly localised, and were probably short-lived. Although the bishops ‘Aqballaha of Ramonin and Nuh of ‘the fortress of Dabarin’ were recognised as suffragans of the metropolitan of Adiabene at the synod of 410, neither bishop is mentioned again. The three dioceses were almost certainly created as ‘consolation prizes’ at the synod of Isaac to resolve conflicting claims on the other three dioceses, and were doubtless suppressed on the death of their incumbents.

The bishop of Karka d’Beth Slokh (modern Kirkuk) became metropolitan of Beth Garmai, the region known to the Romans as Garamaea. Beth Garmai lay between the Lesser Zab and Diyala rivers, and was bounded to the southwest by the Tigris and the Jabal Hamrin, and to the northeast by the district of Shahrzur in the Azmir mountains. The metropolitans of Beth Garmai were responsible for the five suffragan dioceses of Shahrghard, Lashom, Mahoze d’Arewan, Hrbath Glal and Radani. The diocese of Radani was probably another consolation prize. It is not mentioned after 424, when its bishop Narsai was among the signatories of the acts of the synod of Dadisho’, and probably lapsed on Narsai’s death. The other four dioceses had a much longer life, and their bishops attended most of the synods of the fifth and sixth centuries. An independent diocese also existed for the district of Tahal as early as 420, which was incorporated into the province of Beth Garmai just before the end of the sixth century. Tahal has not been satisfactorily localised, but the diocese probably covered the Christian communities of the Lesser Zab valley between Mahoze d’Arewan and Shahrghard. A diocese for the Karme district on the west bank of the Tigris is also attested by the end of the fifth century.

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Iran, Northern Arabia and India. There were at least nine dioceses in Fars and along the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf in the fifth century. Fars was the heartland of the Sasanian Empire and the cradle of Iranian culture, and its Christians considered that they were descended from a nobler stock than the effete Syrians of northern Mesopotamia. They also, like the Christians of India, asserted that their Church had been founded by Saint Thomas, and this controversial claim also set them apart from the Christians of Mesopotamia, who claimed descent from the second-generation apostle Mari. Fars was divided into five administrative regions, whose regional capitals, in order of importance, were Istakhr, Arrajan, Bih Shapur (Kazrun), Ardashir Khurra (Gur) and Darabgird. There were Christians in all of these cities, who eventually accepted the leadership of the bishop of Rev Ardashir. Given its administrative importance, the seat of the bishops of Fars might reasonably have been placed at Istakhr. The choice of the port city of Rev Ardashir suggests that the first Christians entered Fars by sea, and that Rev Ardashir was the base for their missionary activity. Christians only found their way to inland Istakhr later. The diocese of Rev Ardashir is first mentioned in connection with the 'forty-year persecution' of Shapur II, and in 410, judging from the language of the acts of the synod of Isaac, was merely the seat of a bishop. At some point in the next decade the diocese was raised to metropolitan status, as in 420 the metropolitan Ma'na of Rev Ardashir succeeded Yabballaha I as patriarch. Bishops from the dioceses of Istakhr, Ardashir Khurra, Bih Shapur and Darabgird subscribed to the acts of the synod of Dadisho^c in 424. Arrajan does not seem to have had a bishop, though it certainly had a significant Christian community, whose monasteries are attested as late as the eighth century.

There were also four dioceses along the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf, around Qatar and Oman, which seem to have been established in the second half of the fourth century for Christian refugees from Fars. Northern Arabia was only nominally part of the Sasanian Empire, and many Persian Christians fled there for safety during the great persecution of Shapur II. Three dioceses were grouped around the Qatar peninsula, whose Syriac name was Beth Qatraye. One bishop sat at Mashmahig, a town on the small island of Muharraq just to the northeast of Bahrain Island; a second at Dairin, the chief town of the small island of Tarut, just to the northwest of Bahrain; and a third in the town of Hagar, a little inland from Tarut. Much further to the east, immediately to the south of the Straits of Hormuz, there was a fourth diocese, Beth Mazunaye, whose bishop sat in the town of Mazun, modern Oman. There was probably little contact between the Christians of Qatar and Oman and the Christians of southern Arabia dependent on the bishops of Hirta. Because the northern Arabian dioceses were much closer to Fars than to Beth Aramaye, they were placed under the jurisdiction of the

metropolitans of Rev Ardashir. Archaeologists have discovered material traces of the Christians of northern Arabia at several sites along both shores of the Persian Gulf. Particularly important finds have been made on Kharg Island, now the site of a major Iranian oil terminal, where excavations in the 1960s uncovered the ruins of a large monastery, a church and numerous Christian graves. This Christian presence seems to have lasted from the third to the seventh century. Significantly, one of the metropolitans of Fars provided the Christians of Beth Qatrave with texts in Persian, not Syriac. They could probably read both languages, but their bishop wished to affirm their Iranian identity.

Four dioceses emerged in western and northern Iran in the fifth century, partly as a result of the deportation of Roman Christians. In western Iran, Hamadan and Hulwan (known to the Syrians as Beth Lashpar) both had bishops by 410. The diocese of Hulwan was evidently of some antiquity, as the bishop Hurman of Hulwan was put to death during the persecution of Shapur II. The 'forty-year persecution' may well have severely reduced the numbers of native Persian Christians in the Hulwan region, as the bishop Hatita of Hulwan, who was present at the synod of Dadisho^c in 424, was styled 'bishop of the deportation of Beth Lashpar'. This title suggests that Christianity in Hulwan had been revived or refreshed since Hurman's day by an influx of Christian deportees. In northern Iran, Beth Raziqaye (Rai), the scene of several Christian martyrdoms during the persecution of Shapur II, also had a bishop as early as 410. A diocese was also established in the Gurgan district to the southeast of the Caspian Sea in the fifth century for a community of Christians deported from Roman territory. A Roman bishop named Domitian 'of the deportation of Gurgan' was present at the synod of Dadisho^c in 424. In 497 the bishop Abraham of Gurgan, probably a Syrian rather than a Greek, was present at the synod of Babai.

Khorasan and Segestan had at least four dioceses in the fifth century. According to tradition, Christianity was brought to these regions in the second half of the fourth century by a Roman Christian named Barshabba ('son of the deportation'), whose parents had been deported to Persia from Syria. Exiled by Shapur II to Khorasan after he had converted the king's wife Shirin to Christianity, Barshabba later became the first bishop of Merv. A long account of his exploits has been preserved in the *Chronicle of Seert*, and although most of the details are fictitious (at one point the hero rises from the dead), the ascription of Barshabba's career to the reign of Shapur II may well be true. A bishop of Merv named Barshabba subscribed to the acts of the synod of Dadisho^c in 420, and may well have been the city's first bishop and the source of the later tradition. The story lost nothing in the telling, and in later centuries the legend of Barshabba, the miracle-working father of Central Asian Christianity, was well known along

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the Silk Road. In the Sogdian version of this legend, he is said to have planted monasteries not only across the length and breadth of Khorasan and Segestan but also as far east as Balkh, several centuries before Nestorian missionaries ventured into remote Turkestan. The truth is more prosaic. There was certainly a slow but steady extension of Christian influence in the Sasanian provinces of Khorasan and Segestan during the fifth century. Abrashahr (Nishapur) was a diocese as early as 410, and bishops of Merv, Abrashahr, Herat and Segestan were present at the synod of Dadisho^c in 424. By the end of the century the Church of the East had also established a presence in the city of Tus, whose name featured in the title of the bishop of Abrashahr in 497. However, there is no evidence that Christian missionaries had yet ventured in any organised way beyond Sasanian territory. The systematic penetration of Central Asia by missionaries of the Church of the East began in the sixth century, not the fourth.

There were certainly Syrian Christians living in India in the second century, and perhaps even before the end of the first century. There was a well-established trading route between India and the Persian Gulf, and Roman and Persian merchants tended to land on the Malabar Coast of India and carry goods overland to the east coast. The Malabar Coast also had a settled colony of Jews and this, more than any other single factor, may have encouraged early Christian missionary work in India. It is surely no accident that the first Christian communities in India were founded along this coast, and that Christianity later spread eastwards to Madras. At this period Christians could also be found in the Punjab, in the city of Taxila. In one of his rare notices of Christianity beyond the Roman Empire, Eusebius of Caesarea mentioned that the Christian scholar Pantaenus left Alexandria in about 180 and went as a missionary to India, where he found Christians who said that their community had been founded by the apostle Bartholomew. The Thomas legend, evidently, had not yet been invented. Their scriptures were written in a language that Pantaenus could not read, perhaps Hebrew but more probably Syriac. Shortly afterwards the gnostic scholar Bardaisan, working at Edessa, wrote authoritatively on the brahmins of India. He may well have derived his information on India's caste system from Christian friends who had been to India. By the fourth century the Church of the East had begun to send out bishops to these communities. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, the bishop David of Maishan left his diocese in 295 to go to India, where he preached the faith among the Indians. Other men surely followed in his footsteps, though the supply of Persian bishops to the Christians of India was never easy, and there may have been long periods when no bishop was available.

MONASTICISM

The Origins of Syriac Monasticism. The conversion of Constantine put an end to the persecution of Christians in the territories of the Roman Empire. For many devout Christians, this was not an unmixed blessing. The example of the emperor made the Christian faith socially acceptable, encouraging social climbers to profess Christianity in pursuit of worldly ambitions. Christian zealots who in earlier decades might have courted martyrdom to demonstrate the intensity of their faith now found in asceticism the challenge they craved. They could not understand that the Church had become a political force, and had to compromise in order to work effectively in the world. As far as they were concerned, it had sold out to ambition. They therefore turned their back on the comfortable life which most Christians now led, and sought in the harsh solitudes of the Egyptian and Syrian deserts a life of endurance which, as in the days of the persecutions, made of Christianity something more than the soft option it had become in the cities.

The driving force behind the rise of monasticism in the eastern Roman Empire in the fourth century were the Egyptian monks, and such was the prestige of the Egyptian monastic tradition in later centuries that even Syrian authors who knew better attributed the beginnings of monasticism in Syria and Iraq to an Egyptian origin. As far as the medieval authors of the Church of the East were concerned, monasticism was introduced to Persia around 330 by an Egyptian monk named Awgin, who settled in a cave on Mount Izla, close to the Roman frontier near Nisibis, where he attracted a devoted band of followers and organised them into a monastic community. The legend of Mar Awgin, which was invented in the late seventh century, spoke to a desire to associate the Church of the East with one of the most enviable achievements of the Western Church. The myth-makers used their ingenuity to set Awgin in an authentic mid-fourth century context, making him a friend of the celebrated bishop Ya'qob of Nisibis and attributing the defeat of Julian the Apostate's invasion of Persia to his prayers, but it is doubtful whether Awgin even existed. Certainly, monasticism in Syria, Iraq and Persia was an indigenous development, which owed little or nothing to Egypt. It was a looser form of community, with traditions which would have seemed strange to the solitaries of the Egyptian desert.

Its Characteristics. The first Christian ascetics in the eastern Roman Empire and in Persia were men and women vowed to celibacy. These vows were probably taken as adults, as part of the ceremony of Christian baptism. The celibates were known generally as *ibidaye*, 'singletons', and it is clear from the writings of Ephrem the Syrian and his Persian contemporary Aphrahat that they fell into two broad

categories, unmarried Christians (of either sex) known as *bthule*, 'virgins', and married Christians who undertook to refrain from sex within marriage, known as *qaddishe*, 'sanctified ones'. Ephrem himself was probably a singleton, and although neither he nor most other Christians condemned marriage, the singletons believed that celibacy was a more blessed state. Taking their cue from Saint Paul's famous text on marriage, they agreed that it was better to marry than to burn with lust; but believed that it was better still to overcome the temptation to lust by becoming 'sanctified'. The singletons saw themselves, and were perhaps seen by the less single-minded Christians among whom they lived, as an elect. They were, in a spiritual sense, the soldiers of Christ, ready to wage war on Satan and his works. Male soldiers outnumbered female soldiers in this heavenly army, and in token of their elite status were known as 'sons of the covenant' (*bnay qyama*). Some scholars have attempted to link these Syrian 'sons of the covenant' with a more famous group of covenanters, the Essenes of Qumran. The Qumran Jews had also been members of a covenant (*brit* in Hebrew), and had also been dedicated to spiritual warfare. Was Syrian asceticism therefore a direct borrowing from Judaism? The parallels are suggestive, but not particularly convincing. The imagery of the covenant between God and his chosen people occurs over and over again in the Old Testament, and it is unlikely that Christians needed a Jewish example before they began to exploit it in their own patterns of worship.

During the first half of the fourth century most singletons continued to live among their fellow-Christians, where they set an improving example of purity. Later on, probably under the influence of Egyptian monasticism, some men withdrew to the desert and lived as solitaries, while others banded together and founded monasteries. This probably happened towards the end of the fourth century, as the later Syriac terms *daira*, 'monastery', and *dairaye*, 'monks', were unknown to Ephrem and Aphrahat. The separation of the singletons from the wider Christian community may not have been altogether regretted by less competitive Christians. Whenever an elect forms, its members tend to look down their noses at their weaker brethren. The *Book of Steps* (*ktaba d'masqatha*), a repellent tract written towards the end of the fourth century by an anonymous Persian ascetic, divided Christians into the upright (*ki'ne*) and the perfect (*gmire*). The merely upright, alas, were still struggling against sin, and their function was to minister to the needs of the perfect, allowing them to think their beautiful thoughts without distraction. Perfection was achieved only through the renunciation of earthly desires and the rigid discipline of asceticism, and the author of the *Book of Steps* was in no doubt that he himself had made the grade. It is not clear how far such offputting elitism was typical of early Persian monasticism, but he was probably not the only singleton to be guilty of spiritual pride.

Many of these early monks, whether solitaries or monastery-dwellers, practised the most extreme forms of asceticism. They restricted themselves to an unhealthy vegetarian diet, eschewing meat and alcohol and sometimes eating nothing but grass and wild plants. They took as little sleep as possible, sometimes rationing themselves to only one hour a day. They did not bother to wash, leading Saint Jerome to remark that they were as concerned with the filthiness of their bodies as with the cleanliness of their hearts. They made life as uncomfortable for themselves as possible. Some monks slept standing up, either tied to posts or supported by ropes let down from the ceilings of their cells. Some had themselves walled up in caves, or chained to rocks or trees. Some sat on top of tall stone pillars, exposed to the elements. Some took their vows of celibacy so seriously that they castrated themselves. Some made vows of silence. Laughter was frowned upon, and monks were told always to look miserable. It is difficult for many modern scholars to sympathise with such extravagant displays of exhibitionism, but in the eyes of their contemporaries hermits and monks were heroes. Crowds of Christians came to gawk at these uncompromising, colourful figures and seek their blessing.

The Earliest Monasteries. Conventional monastic life may have been slightly less uncomfortable than living as a solitary hermit, though none of the satisfactions of community living were admitted. One of the earliest of these new monasteries was Mar Mattai near Mosul, which later fell into the hands of the Jacobites. Mar Mattai was the first of several monasteries to be built in the hill country of Jabal Maqlub, and by the sixth century there were so many Christian monks living there that the district was known as Alpap, 'thousands'. Several early monasteries were also founded in Beth Aramaye and Beth Huzaye, suggesting a stronger Christian presence in these regions at this period than in later centuries. Two of the more notable foundations in Beth Aramaye were Mar Yonan near Piroz Shabur and Dorqoni near Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The second of these monasteries was founded towards the end of the fourth century by Mar 'Abda. Its monks ran a large school which attracted many students, including the future patriarchs Ahai (410–14) and Yahballaha I (415–20). By the sixth century the monastery's superiors were claiming that Dorqoni had been founded by Mari, the legendary apostle of Babylonia; but the true story, derived from a life of Mar 'Abda written much earlier by the patriarch Ahai, has been preserved in the *Chronicle of Seert*.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Early Syriac Literature. The earliest Christian literature from the Sasanian Empire was written not in Persian but in Syriac, and the Church of the East still continues to use this major dialect of Aramaic in its liturgy. Syriac was the *lingua franca* both in Rome's eastern provinces and in the western provinces of the Sasanian Empire, and the language linked Christians in both empires. The dialect rose to prominence in the sixth century BC, and a few short pagan inscriptions in Syriac survive. From the second century AD onwards, however, Syriac has been overwhelmingly the language of a Christian literature. Christianity in Persia spread first to the Syriac-speaking Mesopotamian provinces and only later to regions like Fars where Persian was the dominant language. As a result, Syriac rapidly established an ascendancy in the Persian Church that lasted until well after the Arab conquest, when it was gradually dethroned by Arabic. Persian-speaking Christians no doubt resented the dominance of Syriac, and an early example of language politics can be seen in the way in which the metropolitans of Fars promoted the use of Persian among the Christians of Fars, northern Arabia and India. The literate Christians of these regions could probably read Syriac without difficulty, but they spoke Persian as their first language and understandably preferred to use books written in Persian. However, while plenty of Syriac texts were translated into Persian, very few original texts were composed in that language. Despite intermittent attempts by Persian-speaking Christians to talk it up, Persian always remained a subordinate language.

The first Syriac texts were doubtless translations of the various books of the Bible. By the sixth century Persian Christians were using a standardised Syriac text which almost completely matched the text in use in the eastern Roman Empire. Scholars would like to know a lot more about how this text was established and what, if any, role contemporary Jewish scholarship played in the stabilisation of the text of the Old Testament, but there is not enough evidence to support a firm conclusion. Clearly, Edessa played a crucial role in this process, as the dialect of Syriac which eventually took hold in the Syriac-speaking Churches in both the Roman and Sasanian Empires was that of Edessa. The standard New Testament canon did not yet exist in the lifetimes of Ephrem and Aphrahat. Rather than the four gospels of the modern Bible, they knew instead the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, a curious 'harmonised' gospel text written in the second half of the second century which boiled down the four overlapping accounts of the life of Jesus into a single narrative. Although he spent much of his life in Antioch and Rome, Tatian was probably born in Persia, as he said he was a native of 'Assyria', an alternative Roman name for the Sasanian region of Babylonia (Beth Aramaye). For several

centuries his *Diatessaron* enjoyed great popularity on both sides of the border, but it was suppressed in the Roman Empire in the fifth century, and although it continued to be used to a certain extent in Persia (Isho'dad of Merv was still quoting from the *Diatessaron* as late as the ninth century), it eventually faded out in favour of the four canonical gospels. By the sixth century the standard Syriac version of the Bible, the Peshitta—so-called from the Syriac word for 'simple' or 'plain'—was almost universally read in both the Roman and Persian Churches. The name was significant. Syriac-speaking Christians could now be sure that they were getting 'plain' scripture, not the Readers' Digest version concocted by Tatian.

Ephrem the Syrian. Unusually, Syriac literature reached its culmination not long after the beginning of its life, with the poetry of Ephrem the Syrian and the elegant prose of his Persian counterpart Aphrahat, both of whom flourished in the first half of the fourth century. Strictly speaking, Ephrem lived in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire and had nothing to do with the Church of the East, but he is honoured by all the Syriac-speaking Churches as the first and greatest Syriac poet, had an important influence on their thought, and heads the list of Syriac authors compiled by the Nestorian metropolitan 'Abdisho' of Nisibis at the end of the thirteenth century. He belongs to all Syriac-speaking Christians alike, and it would be eccentric to omit his name from a survey of the early literature of the Church of the East.

Ephrem was born around 308 somewhere in the eastern Roman Empire, and was present during the abortive siege of Nisibis by Shapur II in 338. He used to be credited with the authorship of nearly three million lines, but modern scholars would reduce that figure considerably. It is not always certain which poems were Ephrem's, as many verses of uncertain authorship were later ascribed to him. Most of his poems were hymns, and some of them were composed to be sung by choirs of women. Ephrem showed considerable sensitivity in his verse, but he was also a great hater. He disliked the Jews, and he disliked the heretics Bardaisan, Marcion and Mani. Being temperamentally averse himself to logical thinking, he also disliked logic-chopping Greeks. His talents have been warmly praised, sometimes to the point of idolatry. One of the reasons Ephrem's output was so large was that he was verbose, and took little trouble to set down his ideas in a disciplined, logical and persuasive sequence. Such is the temper of our times that his inability to meet the accepted standards of classical decorum has been commended as a sign of his emancipation from the constricting shackles of Greek thought. He has even been admired for reproducing the inconsequential ebb and flow of everyday conversation. There is perhaps something in this, but the conversation might have been more enjoyable if Ephrem did not ramble off the point quite so often.

Ephrem's great virtue was that he evaded the trap of excessive rationalism. In the fourth century AD the Christian Church, that indivisible 'nation from the nations', as Ephrem's contemporary Aphrahat put it, was tearing itself apart in quibbles over the precise nature of Christ's divinity and humanity. To Ephrem, these were mysteries that defied human reason, and he deeply distrusted the abstruse speculations of the Greek theologians. Mere created beings, thought Ephrem, should approach these divine mysteries in a spirit of wonder (*tebra*), a key word in his thought. He therefore warned his readers to shun the poisonous teachings of the *Yawnaye*, the Greeks, and cleave to the simplicity of the apostles. Which particular Greeks did he have in mind? Almost certainly not the great Fathers of the Church, but heretics such as Arius and Aetius who claimed too much for reason. Ephrem's distrust of human rationalism as a sufficient guide to religious truth has won him many admirers over the centuries, and strikes a particularly sympathetic chord today, in a postmodern age weary of the grand certainties of the Enlightenment.

Ephrem circled around his subject. His technique has been aptly compared to a gentle and relaxed fireside conversation between two old friends, where ideas, like pearls, are taken up, examined, admired from different angles and laid reverently down again. He also, in accordance with his philosophy of wonder, typically approached an idea not by definition but by illustration. Here, of course, he was following in the footsteps of Jesus himself, who used parables rather than definitions to convey his meaning. 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.' 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who went on a journey.' 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.' Ephrem was interested in symbolism and typology, and often took a commonplace Christian trope—Christ as the bridegroom, Christ as the pearl beyond price—and teased out its various implications, sometimes to the point of paradox. For Ephrem, as for most of his readers, the Old Testament prefigured the New, and he achieved some of his most striking effects by pointed contrasts or juxtapositions between the two halves of the Bible. In daring flights of fancy, using similes that went far beyond the conventional allegorical interpretations of scripture, he compared Adam to Christ and Eve to Mary. He was writing for Christian readers who knew their Bibles, and his poetry can only be fully appreciated if the reader is aware of his constant scriptural allusions. Ephrem should only be read in an annotated edition, or with a good concordance to hand.

Aphrahat and His Contemporaries. Across the border, in Sasanian territory, Ephrem was matched by his contemporary Aphrahat, commonly known as 'the Persian sage' (*hakkima parsaya*). Aphrahat (the name is merely a latinisation of the Persian

name Farhad, still common in Iran to this day) is the first major Syriac writer from the Church of the East whose works survive. Little is known of the circumstances of his life, and later tradition anachronistically made him into the superior of the monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul. He was evidently a prominent figure in the Persian Church, was probably a singleton, may well have been a bishop, and was one of the minority of Persian Christians who prayed for a Roman victory in the war which broke out in 338. He lived long enough to witness the beginnings of Shapur's persecution, and probably died in 345 or shortly afterwards. Aphrahat was a less verbose and more disciplined writer than Ephrem, and has left twenty-three homilies, the so-called *Demonstrations* (*tabnyatha*). These for the most part dealt either with aspects of the Christian life or with the threat posed to the Church by the seductions of Judaism. There was much common ground between the two religions, and after 338, when Christians were being persecuted and Jews were not, many Persian Christians must have considered converting to Judaism. Aphrahat did his best to head them off from such a drastic course. One of his main themes was that the Christians had replaced the Jews as God's chosen people and had themselves become 'a nation out of the nations'. Whereas Ephrem had seen no need to pull his punches when writing about the Jews, regularly denouncing them as 'crucifiers' (*salobe, xaqope*), Aphrahat did not insult the Jews directly. Nevertheless, his relentless argumentation, buttressed by a string of proof texts, was perhaps an even more effective technique for putting them in their place.

The great persecution of Shapur II was commemorated in the second half of the fourth century in a remarkable outpouring of texts that bore witness to the suffering of the Persian Church and preserved the memory of the Christians who had been tortured and executed for their faith. These texts, collectively known as the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs*, described the martyrdoms of Christians both great and small, from the patriarch Shem'on bar Sabba'e to the humblest deaconess. The earliest texts were written while the persecution was still raging; the later ones long afterwards. Their quality and value vary considerably. Some, such as the acts of Barshabya, are sober, prosaic documents. Others, such as the account of the martyrdom of the bishop Miles of Susa at Rai, contain so much fantastic embellishment that it is almost impossible to isolate the underlying core of truth. It used to be believed that the Persian martyr acts were the work of Marutha of Maiperqat, the Roman envoy who founded the city of Martyropolis as an act of commemoration, but they are clearly the product of many hands and the work of many years. In fact, they were assembled for publication during the last decade of the fourth century by an unknown Persian Christian who may himself have written some of them. According to Mari, the patriarch Ahai (410–14) made a pilgrimage to the sites of martyrdom long before he became patriarch, and

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also compiled a book of martyr acts. He may well have been responsible for the publication of the martyr acts in the form in which they have come down to us. However, Marutha may have been the author of the list of over 120 named Persian martyrs preserved at the end of the oldest surviving dated Syriac manuscript. This manuscript, now in the British Museum, was copied in Edessa in 411, a year after Marutha's attendance at the synod of Isaac in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The list contains the names of fifteen bishops, including Shem'on bar Sabba'e and his ill-fated successors Shahdost and Barba'shmin, and scores of priests, deacons, and humbler men and women.

Christological Concerns. The christological disputes in the eastern Roman Empire that followed the condemnation of Nestorius in 431 were followed with concern by Christian scholars in Persia, and the literature of the Church of the East in the second half of the fifth century gradually became more ideologically charged. The patriarch Dadisho' (421–56), who wrote biblical commentaries on several books of the Old Testament, was the last leader of the Persian Church able to confine his literary interests to uncontroversial topics. The bishop Mari of Rev Ardashir or 'Mari the Persian', who flourished around the middle of the fifth century, was more closely engaged in the christological struggles of the day. Like Dadisho', he wrote a commentary on the book of Daniel. He also wrote a treatise against the magi of Nisibis, displaying the absurdity of fire worship and the superiority of Christian beliefs. These were familiar enough topics for a Persian bishop, but Mari made no secret of his support for the dyophysite christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and was the recipient of a famous letter from the bishop Ibas of Edessa, lamenting the triumph of Cyril and his adherents in the Roman Empire. He aired his beliefs in his commentary on the lost letters of the Roman bishop Acacius of Amid, a noted champion of the Antiochene christology.

During the fifth century a large number of Greek texts were translated into Syriac for the edification of Persian Christians. This development reflected a feeling on the part of Persian Christians, in the wake of the persecution of Shapur II, that the Church of the East ought to show as much solidarity as it could with the Western Churches. The adoption by the Church of the East of the acts of the Council of Nicaea in 410 and the acts of several other Western synods in 424, all of which needed to be translated from Greek into Syriac, were the first fruits of this new interest in the affairs of the Western Christians. The translation of Greek texts into Syriac would probably have proceeded at a more stately pace if no other considerations had been involved, but the christological disputes of the middle decades of the fifth century imparted a new sense of urgency to the task. Persian Christians demanded Syriac translations of the Greek Fathers, so that they could

better understand the clash between the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of theology; and this demand was met by the eager young students who clustered around Bar Sawma at the Persian School in Edessa, whose Greek was good enough for the task. The translators preserved their anonymity, and it is not possible to identify the individuals responsible for particular productions, but their output was impressive. By the end of the fifth century the Church of the East had Syriac translations of the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa) and the works of John Chrysostom and Athanasius of Alexandria. It also had translations of the theological outpourings of the two great champions of the Antiochene cause, Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and of the works of sympathisers such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus. It did not yet have a Syriac version of the works of Nestorius, as these had been proscribed in the Roman Empire and were hard to find, but it soon would have. The translation of so much Western Christian literature into Syriac in the fifth century exposed Syriac writers to Greek influences, and set the scene for the 'hellenisation' of Syriac literature in the sixth century.

During the turbulent decades of the 480s and 490s, several writers of the Church of the East exerted themselves to defend the Antiochene christology against all comers. Bar Sawma himself wrote little, though six of his letters to the patriarch Acacius have survived. Hosea, who succeeded Bar Sawma as metropolitan of Nisibis around 495, was chosen by Acacius to write a defence of Christianity in thirty-eight chapters for presentation to the Persian king Kavadh I. It must have taken considerable skill to compose a document that asserted the truth of Christianity without directly attacking Zoroastrianism, and Hosea must have already won a reputation as a wordsmith to have been honoured in this way. Acacius himself wielded his pen to good effect. Besides translating Hosea's defence of Christianity into Persian—he must have been completely bilingual in Syriac and Persian—he wrote a long treatise against the monophysites. He is also known to have written less controversial essays on fasting and faith. But the great champion of the dyophysite cause was the theologian Narsai, Bar Sawma's great friend and the author of some of the Church of the East's most admired religious poetry. Narsai, a native of the town of Ma'altha in Beth Nuhadra, was head of the School of Edessa during the crucial middle decades of the fifth century, but returned to Persia some years before its final closure in 489 and was recruited by Bar Sawma to set up the School of Nisibis. He died in 502 or thereabouts, and probably lived to see the formal adoption of the Theodoran christology by the Church of the East during the reign of the patriarch Babai (497–502). He was a prolific author. According to 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, he wrote commentaries on many of the books of the Old Testament and was the author of twelve volumes

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of verse homilies (containing a total of 360 *memre*), a number of liturgical works and sermons, a large number of hymns, and a treatise *On the Corruption of Morals*. Most of Narsai's extensive *oeuvre* has been lost, but around eighty of his verse homilies have survived. A generous selection of these surviving *memre*, several of which deal with the christological controversies of the day, was published by the Chaldean priest Alphonse Mingana in 1905. In several of his surviving texts Narsai attacked the impious teachings of Cyril of Alexandria and defended the Antiochene christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Narsai's work is pervaded by Theodore's thought, and he held the classic Theodoran view that two distinct natures were united in Christ in one person. His enemies, however, preferred to misread his language. Unsurprisingly, Narsai was judged by his contemporaries more on theological than on literary grounds. To his admirers, he was the 'Harp of the Holy Spirit'; but to the Jacobite controversialist Shem'on of Beth Arsham, he was 'Narsai the Leper'.

Chapter Two
NESTORIANS AND JACOBITES
(503–633)

OVERVIEW

While the dyophysites were busy entrenching their position within Persia, important religious developments were also taking place in the Roman Empire. In the first half of the sixth century a christological movement emerged which stressed the single nature of Christ. This movement, denounced by its opponents as monophysitism but more correctly to be understood as miaphysitism, was at the opposite end of the theological spectrum from Nestorianism, and was born in reaction to the decisions taken at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Its supporters were mainly to be found in the eastern provinces which bordered on the Persian Empire, whose churches were subject to the patriarch of Antioch. In the 520s they were purged from all positions of influence within the patriarchate of Antioch by the emperor Justin, and retaliated by establishing a Church of their own. This Church, now known as the Syrian Orthodox Church, they claimed as the true descendent of the ancient Church of Antioch, and their institutions therefore closely mirrored those of the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Antioch. They elected their own patriarch, who sat at Antioch like his Chalcedonian rival, and they organised in the cities of the patriarchate of Antioch a formidable array of bishops with dioceses that closely corresponded to those in the Chalcedonian hierarchy. The chief proponents of the miaphysite theology in the early years of the seventh century were the theologians Philoxenus of Mabbugh and Severus of Antioch. One generation later, one of the movement's most effective defenders was Jacob Baradaeus, bishop of Edessa. Their opponents therefore called the 'monophysites' either Jacobites or Severans, in much the same way as they called the strict dyophysites Nestorians. As a result, the Syrian Orthodox Church has been known as the Jacobite Church for most of its history, just as the Church of the East has been the Nestorian Church. Before the twentieth century the Jacobites were no more uncomfortable with their label than the Nestorians were with theirs, but in recent decades the term 'Jacobite' has become almost as sensitive as 'Nestorian' in the eyes of advocates of political correctness.

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Hardly surprisingly, there was no official support from the leaders of the Church of the East for the miaphysite movement across the border, but these leaders did not speak for all Persian Christians. An important Christian minority in Tagrit and the monastery of Mar Mattai had refused to submit to Bar Sawma's violence in 484. Men like these, although powerless in the short term to prevent the imposition of Bar Sawma's dyophysite views on the Church of the East, did not give up the struggle. Their best defence against Nestorianism was solidarity with their fellow believers in the Roman Empire, and the communities which were formed to resist Bar Sawma were later to supply the leadership for the Jacobite Church inside Persia, which recognised the authority of the Jacobite patriarch at Antioch.

For the first four decades of the sixth century the Roman Jacobites and the Persian Nestorians remained frustrated spectators of one another's errors. In 540, however, war again broke out between Rome and Persia, and the Persians achieved a major success by capturing Antioch and Apamea. As many as 300,000 Jacobite Christians were reputedly transported deep into Persia to new homes in Segestan. In 541 the Roman general Belisarius lost Callinicus to the Persians and, according to Procopius, further tens of thousands of Jacobite captives were deported to Persia. Large numbers of Jacobite prisoners were also transported to Persia from Dara after it fell to the Persians in 573. In 589 a group of captives from Dara, imprisoned in the notorious Castle of Oblivion at Giligerdon near Jundishapur, overpowered and killed their guards with the aid of some Kurdish fellow-prisoners and then trekked hundreds of miles through Mesopotamia to return, 'after many experiences and achievements', to Roman territory. But such exploits were rare, and most of these captives remained in Persia for the rest of their lives.

As a result of these mass captivities the Jacobite movement now began to play an important part in the history of Christianity in Persia. For the first time the Nestorian Church had to deal with a large body of Christians with opposed theological beliefs within the borders of the Persian Empire. By 570 an organised Jacobite Church, with a primate, bishops and a monastic order, existed in the territories of the Sasanian Empire. As it was not possible for the Jacobite patriarch at Antioch to consecrate bishops for cities in hostile Persia, the Church was at first headed by a metropolitan consecrated by the Armenian patriarch, the head of the nearest friendly miaphysite Church. Later on it had its own primates, who rejected the name *catholicus* and instead styled themselves 'maphrians', a curious Syriac title which literally means 'fertiliser'. The Nestorians argued at court that the Jacobites should be forcibly converted to Nestorianism, but did not get their way. Instead, the Jacobites fiercely opposed the Nestorians. As the Persian kings gradually became aware that the Jacobite christology was as disliked in

the Roman Empire as the Nestorian, they began to treat the Jacobite captivities with a generosity that appalled the Nestorians. The Nestorians had numbers on their side, but they badly misplayed their hand. Through an act of sheer folly on the part of the leaders of the Church of the East, the Jacobites came close to unseating their rivals as the national Church of Persia during the final decades before the Arab conquest.

The struggle between the Nestorians and the Jacobites spurred a vigorous revival of monasticism in the Church of the East during the second half of the sixth century. It also indelibly coloured the literature of the period. A large number of partisan tracts by both Nestorian and Jacobite authors have survived, and it is no coincidence that the sixth century was a golden age for the falsification of the early history of the Nestorian Church. Challenged in their own heartland, the Nestorians burnished the image of the Church of the East by filling in the blanks in its early history with an array of myths and legends designed to stress its antiquity and apostolic foundation. The Nestorians were skilled forgers, and like good historical novelists distracted attention from their inventions by providing large doses of plausible local colour. The apparent verisimilitude of their narratives has taken in some modern scholars who ought to have known better; and some of the historical novels written during the sixth century, particularly the notorious *Chronicle of Erbil*, continue to generate scholarly controversy.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*The Schism of Narsai and Elisha*⁴. The Nestorian patriarch Babai died in 502 and was succeeded in 503 by his archdeacon Shila, who reigned until 523. Surprisingly little is known about Shila's twenty-year reign. The most important fact about him was that he enjoyed the confidence of the Persian king Kavadh I (488–531), because one of his bishops, Buzaq of Hormizd Ardashir, had once cured the king and his daughter of an illness. Like Babai, Shila was married, with children. His wife was Babai's daughter, and it was widely believed that she kept her husband under her thumb. Perhaps because of this suspicion, Shila was an unpopular patriarch. He is said to have been avaricious, and the misogynistic author of the *Chronicle of Seert* blamed this failure on his nagging wife. On one occasion he is said to have confiscated all the plate from a church and given it to his son. The priest Mari of Tahal vigorously protested at this theft, and was excommunicated for his pains. That is virtually all the sources have to say about Shila's reign. They say hardly a word on how Persian Christians reacted to his predecessor's embrace of a hardline Antiochene theological position in 497. Yet during the two crucial

decades of Shila's reign the strict dyophysite theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia was slowly but surely imposed upon the Persian Church by the bishops and priests of the Church of the East. It seems unlikely that this was an entirely peaceful process, and there are hints that it was not. Either Babai, but more probably Shila, imprisoned Shem'on of Beth Arsham, the chief spokesman for miaphysitism in Persia, but Shem'on was later released after an appeal to the Persian king from the Roman emperor Anastasius. Tagrit, whose Christians had put up such a stout resistance to Bar Sawma in 484, remained a miaphysite stronghold.

After Shila's death in 523 a dispute over his successor split the Church of the East into two factions for fifteen years and created enormous ill-feeling. According to the sources, this schism was not the result of a christological dispute, but was simply a quarrel between two obstinate rivals. Shila had already chosen his successor, an accomplished physician named Elisha^c who was well regarded at court by both the king and the magi. With these advantages, Elisha^c was in a strong position, but to make assurance doubly sure Shila gave him his daughter in marriage and designated him as his successor in his will. There should have been a smooth succession, but the influential bishop Buzaq of Hormizd Ardashir rallied support for a lawyer named Narsai. Narsai appealed to conservatives in the Church of the East who set store by outward appearances. He had few of Elisha^c's social advantages, but he held a respectable professional qualification and he was an assiduous churchgoer. The Christians of Seleucia-Ctesiphon accepted Buzaq's mediation, because he refused to accept the office of patriarch for himself, and an attempt was made to consecrate Narsai in June 523. The ceremony was broken up by Elisha^c's supporters, and for ten months there was deadlock. In April 524 the metropolitan David of Merv arrived in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and tried to break the stalemate by consecrating Elisha^c. As Narsai's supporters would have stoutly resisted any attempt to use the patriarchal church of Kokhe in Seleucia for this ceremony, Elisha^c was instead consecrated in the church of Aspanir in nearby Ctesiphon, in the presence of 'several bishops with no sense of justice'. David's attempt to present Narsai's supporters with a *fait accompli* backfired. Elisha^c's consecration was widely felt to have been irregular, and Narsai's supporters retaliated by proclaiming their own candidate patriarch. Narsai was also consecrated in April 524, by the metropolitan Giwargis of Nisibis, in the church of Kokhe. This traditional consecration was a definite point in Narsai's favour, but his claim to be the legitimate patriarch was soon fatally weakened by Kavadh's decision to recognise Elisha^c instead.

For the next fifteen years the Church of the East had two patriarchs, Narsai and Elisha^c. Neither claimant was willing to give way, and each of them proceeded to consecrate his own bishops in defiance of the other. Before long many dioceses

had two rival bishops, and the effects of the schism were felt as far afield as Segestan. Both patriarchs made money from the schism, selling dioceses to likely candidates. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, an important source for the schism, rival groups of supporters came to blows in the churches, and in some cases tried to kill each other. The dispute between the two patriarchs divided families as well as communities, setting children against parents and brother against brother. Meanwhile, Persian Christians who had separated from the Church of the East when it adopted a strict dyophysite stance in 497 now rejoiced to see this heretical Church tearing itself apart. Several bishops attempted to remain neutral in the dispute, including the metropolitan Ya'qob of Beth Huzaye and the bishop Samuel of Kashkar. Elisha^c, who enjoyed the king's support and was able to make use of Persian troops to enforce his claims, gradually began to gain the upper hand. He made a tour of the eastern provinces of the Sasanian Empire, replacing Narsai's bishops with his own in a score of dioceses in Beth Huzaye, Fars, Beth Qatrave, Tabaristan and Khorasan, and calling out the militia to imprison dihard supporters of Narsai. Narsai himself was eventually arrested, and imprisoned by Kavadh's orders.

Narsai's arrest should have ended the schism, but Kavadh died in 531 and was succeeded by his son Khusro I Anushirwan (531–79). Khusro, for reasons that are not altogether clear, released Narsai from prison, and for a while his fading fortunes revived. Elisha^c unsuccessfully attempted to replace the neutral bishop Samuel of Kashkar with one of his own nominees, and found himself embroiled in a feud with the Christians of Kashkar that polarised opinion within the Church of the East. Although Elisha^c may have locked up their bishops, Narsai still had many supporters, and large numbers of Christians flocked to Kashkar from nearby Beth Garmai and Beth Huzaye to demonstrate their solidarity with Samuel and his flock. Elisha^c stiffened the ranks of the opposition by complaining bitterly, 'How do these miserable insects think they can get the better of me, since I have been victorious everywhere else?' He was ready to send Persian troops into Kashkar to compel his opponents to submit, at whatever cost in blood, but his position was weakened by an impudent piece of theatre staged by the defenders of Kashkar. Elisha^c was in the habit of flourishing Kavadh's edict of recognition whenever he made public appearances in the patriarchal palace in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and at one of his levees a spy from Kashkar came forward to kiss the patriarch's hand, seized the edict from him, and threw it to an accomplice. In the subsequent confusion the two men made their escape and the vital edict was never seen again. This public humiliation lost Elisha^c much of his support.

The schism formally ended in 539 with the death of Narsai. Buzaq of Hormizd Ardashir asked Khusro Anushirwan to recognise Elisha^c as the legitimate

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patriarch, but Khusro realised that peace would only return to the troubled Persian Church if it was given a new patriarch untainted by the events of the past fifteen years. With Khusro's approval, Elisha^c was deposed and excommunicated shortly after Narsai's death by the Nestorian bishops, who elected Buzaq's archdeacon Paul patriarch. As archdeacon of Hormizd Ardashir, Paul had once supplied much-needed water to a Persian army negotiating the mountains of Khuzistan during the stifling heat of summer, thereby earning Khusro's gratitude. He was also highly regarded by his peers in the Church of the East for the adroitness with which he had managed to appear neutral during the schism, and it was hoped that as patriarch he would reconcile both parties and restore peace in the Church. Unfortunately, he died only two months after taking office. It is difficult to know whether he would have fulfilled his promise. The studied neutrality that had seen him in such good stead before his appointment slipped a little during his few short weeks in office, and he was suspected of favouring Elisha^c's party.

Aba I and His Successors. Luckily, his successor was a man of great abilities and energy. The patriarch Aba I (540–52), who had converted from Zoroastrianism to Christianity, had been for many years a powerful official in the Persian government, where he had developed a taste for good administration. After his baptism at Hirta he studied at the School of Nisibis, visited Constantinople between 525 and 533, and admitted there his adherence to the strict dyophysite teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. He was consecrated patriarch in January 540, and one of his first actions was to found a theological school in Seleucia-Ctesiphon on the model of the School of Nisibis. He then made a determined effort to restore unity in the Church. The effects of the schism of Narsai and Elisha^c were still apparent in many dioceses, and he was obliged to 'pacify' the churches of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Piroz Shabur, and to make a personal progress around the dioceses of Beth Aramaye, Beth Huzaye, Maishan and Fars to restore order. Most of the bishops of these provinces rallied to him and accompanied him in his progress, and with their support he was able by the end of the year to replace the refractory metropolitans of Maishan and Fars with reliable successors, to remove three abusively-consecrated bishops from the diocese of Kashkar and two dioceses in Beth Huzaye, to resolve a dispute between the Christians of Hormizd Ardashir and their bishop, to reconsecrate all priests and deacons irregularly ordained during the schism, and to secure the written approval of all the bishops and notables of the towns concerned for his actions. He also composed a dispute in the eastern province of Merv by temporarily dividing the diocese of Segestan between two rival bishops. It was an impressive performance, but despite his strenuous efforts opposition remained in the Church, and at a synod convened in 544 shortly after

the death of the metropolitan Paul of Beth Huzaye he was forced to warn his opponents against any attempts to fill the vacant archdioceses of Nisibis and Jundishapur without his consent.

The reign of Aba I was overshadowed by the renewal of war between Rome and Persia in 540, which provoked a brief persecution of Christians in the Sasanian Empire which ended in 545. The main victims were prominent converts from Zoroastrianism, and included the Persian army commander Pihrangushnasp, who had taken the Christian name Gregory on his baptism, and his companion Yazdpanah. As an apostate Zoroastrian himself, Aba too was legally liable to death, and although Khusro did not allow his execution he bowed to pressure from the Zoroastrian authorities by imprisoning him for several years and then exiling him to Adarbaigan. Aba died in 552, but the circumstances of his death are disputed. According to Bar Hebraeus he died in prison after returning to Seleucia-Ctesiphon in defiance of the king's orders. According to another, probably more reliable, tradition, he was pardoned by Khusro, welcomed back to court, and went to Beth Huzaye on the king's orders to prevent the region's Christians from supporting a revolt by Khusro's Christian son Anoshazad. Worn out by his sufferings in prison, he fell ill on his way back to Seleucia-Ctesiphon and died shortly afterwards, despite the attentions of Khusro's own doctors.

Aba was succeeded by Joseph (552–67), one of the less appealing Nestorian patriarchs. Joseph was Khusro's chief physician, and was imposed upon the Church of the East without any consultation by the Persian king after the death of Aba I. Joseph believed that patriarchs could do whatever they liked, and for two years he governed the Church without the advice of his metropolitans, secure in the knowledge that there was little they could do about it as long as he enjoyed Khusro's support. He was not a man who suffered fools gladly, and dealt robustly with unsophisticated petitioners who distracted him from his patriarchal duties with trivial requests. If he felt that his time was being wasted, he ordered his deacons to chain the offender to a manger outside the patriarchal residence and tie an ass's halter around his neck. These autocratic ways did not endear him to his bishops, and he was eventually forced to hold a synod in 554, which ordained that no important decisions could be taken by a patriarch without prior consultation with at least three bishops. Joseph continued to govern as though the synod had never taken place. He scandalised the faithful by taking bribes, deposing bishops he disliked and appointing his own nominees in their places.

He finally crossed the line when he imprisoned the bishop Shem'on of Piroz Shabur, an old man of great piety. Shem'on died in prison, and in 567 Joseph's bishops held a second synod, at which they deposed him. Strictly speaking they had no power to do so, since the synod of Aba I in 544 had decreed that a patriarch

could not be deposed by his bishops, and Joseph blithely ignored this censure. The crisis was only resolved when Mushe of Nisibis, who had succeeded Joseph as Khusro's chief doctor, persuaded the Persian king to abandon Joseph. Since Joseph was Khusro's nominee, the matter had to be handled tactfully. Choosing his moment, Mushe told the story of the well-meaning monarch who had presented a poor man with an elephant, which promptly began to eat him out of house and home. 'What's your point?' the king asked. 'Your majesty, please take away your elephant!' Joseph was thereupon deposed by Khusro, to the great relief of the Persian bishops, and his reign was declared illegitimate. He spent the last three years of his life rewriting the early history of the Church of the East to justify his conduct in office. In the thirteenth century it was well known, even to the Jacobite historian Bar Hebraeus, that the supposed correspondence between Papa and the Western bishops in 315, denying the right of the bishops to depose their patriarch, had been forged by Joseph after his own deposition.

During Joseph's reign the influence of the School of Nisibis, founded by Bar Sawma three quarters of a century earlier as a refuge for scholars driven from Edessa, reached its peak. This extraordinary institution, whose aim was to provide a reliable theological training to future Nestorian clerics, was a cross between an Oxford college and a prison. Lacking any other model for disciplining their hundreds of youthful charges, successive presidents from Narsai onwards ran the School like a monastery. Its head was addressed respectfully as 'Teacher' (*Rabban*), and prospective students, whether or not they were planning to become monks after their graduation, had to promise to remain celibate during their three years of residence. Although this vow was a prudent precaution, the School's spartan discipline and cramped dormitory arrangements severely limited the opportunities for amorous dalliance. There was a single nine-month term, which began in November and ended in July, and during this period the students were not allowed to leave the School's grounds. During their three-month vacation in the heat of summer they were confined to the city limits of Nisibis. They were warned against making a nuisance of themselves during the long vacation. They were not allowed to eat in restaurants or inns, or to stroll in the public gardens, and were strictly forbidden from visiting any of the city's nunneries. The frontier between Zoroastrian Persia and Christian Rome lay only a few miles to the north, but jaunts across the border into Roman territory were also prohibited. The theological education provided at the School was free of charge, but the students probably paid for their food and upkeep and also had to be able to support themselves during the three months each year when they were thrown onto the streets of Nisibis. The curriculum was strictly regulated, and during their stay at the School the students learned by heart the order of service in the

Nestorian churches, studied and interpreted the Bible, and learned how to write good Syriac. Above all, they imbibed the wisdom of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the 'Interpreter' *par excellence* in the eyes of the Nestorians. The School did not disdain the teachings of other great doctors of the Church, and had a fine theological library, but it was the works of Theodore that were principally commended to the students. By the time they graduated they possessed the knowledge to serve the Church of the East as priests and the ability to defend the Nestorian christology against the accusations of the Jacobites. Many students indeed went on to higher things, trading on the friendships they had made during their youth. Most of the Church of the East's bishops and metropolitans in the second half of the sixth century were graduates of the School of Nisibis, as were the patriarchs Isho'yahb I (585–95) and Sabrisho' I (596–604).

Khusro did not allow another patriarch to be appointed during Joseph's lifetime, and for three years after Joseph's removal the Church was administered by Mari, bishop of Kashkar, in his capacity as 'guardian of the throne' (*natar kursya*). Joseph finally died in 570, and was succeeded as patriarch by Ezekiel (570–81), who held the office for eleven years. Ezekiel, who had been consecrated bishop of Piroz Shabur by Joseph to replace the hapless Shem'on, proved to be a refreshingly capable patriarch in some respects. Although there was some opposition to his election, he soon won over the doubters by his sensible policies. Instead of stirring up trouble by removing the men appointed by his predecessor, he confirmed all the priests and deacons ordained by Joseph. But he was too much of a realist to be entirely successful in his handling of his bishops, who had to deal with the effects of a terrible plague in Mesopotamia that had broken out towards the end of Joseph's reign. The Persian authorities were unable to cope with the heavy loss of life, and bodies lay unburied in the streets. In Seleucia-Ctesiphon, according to the eighth-century historian Bar Sahde of Kirkuk, the detested patriarch Joseph had led a gang of gravediggers to clear away the corpses, setting an example of courage and sacrifice that had won grudging praise even from his detractors. As the plague continued to rage during the reign of Ezekiel, the metropolitans of Adiabene and Beth Garmai did what they could to keep up the spirits of their flock. They ordered services of penitence and intercession to be held in all the churches under their jurisdiction, as the Ninevites had supposedly done in the days of the prophet Jonah. The 'Rogation of the Ninevites', as this service was called, is still observed every year by the Church of the East. To Ezekiel, however, a service of penitence was an empty gesture, and he angrily observed that his bishops were no better than 'the blind leading the blind'. Two years before his death Ezekiel himself went blind, a misfortune widely held to have been a divine judgement on him for his presumption.

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The Apogee of the Church of the East. Khusro died in 579 and was succeeded by his son Hormizd IV (579–90), who was unusually open-minded for a Persian king. At one point in his reign he rejected an appeal from the magi for a persecution of the Christians with the words, 'My throne stands on four feet, not two; on Jews and Christians as well as on Zoroastrians.' In 572 Khusro had again gone to war with Rome, winning an initial success in 573 by capturing the border town of Dara. Thereafter the campaigning had gone against the Persians, and in 578 the future emperor Maurice laid waste Arzun, capturing tens of thousands of Persian prisoners who were resettled in Cyprus. Hormizd was anxious to end his father's war, and opened peace negotiations with the Romans. Although his initial efforts were rebuffed, a local truce was concluded in 579 between the Roman and Persian forces in Arzun, where Maurice's campaign had begun to bog down. The Persian negotiator was the Nestorian bishop of Arzun, Isho'yahb. Isho'yahb was able to pass valuable information on Roman troop deployments to the Persian commanders, and his loyalty served him in good stead. On the death of Ezekiel in 581 Hormizd instructed the leaders of the Church of the East to appoint Isho'yahb patriarch instead of a rival contender. Isho'yahb I (585–95), familiarly known as Isho'yahb of Arzun to distinguish him from his two seventh-century successors of the same name, was duly consecrated in 585. His relations with the Persian king were excellent, and for the remainder of his reign Hormizd showed Persia's Christians more favour than any of his predecessors had done. Unwilling to condemn to death the Christian noblewoman Golinduk, a convert from Zoroastrianism who had been imprisoned and tortured by the magi, he arranged for her to escape from custody and find sanctuary across the border in Roman territory, where she was hailed as a 'living martyr'.

Isho'yahb, like most Nestorian bishops at this period, was a graduate of the School of Nisibis. He held a synod immediately after his consecration, in which another important step in the self-definition of the Church of the East was taken. By now the Church of the Roman Empire was organised into five patriarchates (Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem). As the Church of the East did not recognise the acts of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which had admitted Jerusalem as a patriarchate, there were in its eyes only four Roman patriarchates. At the synod of Isho'yahb the Church of the East claimed to be a fifth patriarchate, equal in all respects with its four Roman counterparts. Although the claim was understandable, given the Church's separated history and its growing importance under the later Sasanian rulers, it was also arrogant and exorbitant. The Church of the East, despite its half a dozen metropolitan provinces and several score dioceses, was considerably smaller than any of the Roman patriarchates. There were probably more Christians in a single metropolitan

province of the patriarchate of Antioch than there were in the entire Sasanian Empire. Nevertheless, the assertion of equality flattered the self-esteem of the Nestorian patriarchs, and for the next seven centuries the claim to be a fifth patriarchate was repeated by all Nestorian writers on canon law. It was still being made at the beginning of the fourteenth century by the Nestorian metropolitan ‘Abdisho’ of Nisibis, one of the great experts on the canon law of the Church of the East.

Isho‘yahb also used this synod to shore up the traditional Theodoran christology of the Church of the East in the face of a Chalcedonian challenge from Hnana, the president of the School of Nisibis. A century earlier, under Bar Sawma and Narsai, the School of Nisibis had made its reputation by defending the Antiochene cause. Narsai had staffed the school with dyophysite refugees from Edessa, insisted that its scholars pursue theological studies at the expense of secular learning, and organised its curriculum around the exegetical writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. His immediate successor Elisha’ bar Quzbaye made little change to these arrangements, but the School’s third president Abraham of Beth Rabban, who took over from Elisha’ around 550, introduced some welcome elements of secular learning into Narsai’s hardline ideological curriculum. Abraham’s students, at this period around eight hundred in number, were able to study literature, history and philology, and were encouraged to make translations from Greek into Syriac, and the School became an important conduit for the transfer of ideas between the Roman and Persian Churches. In 570 Hnana became president of the School of Nisibis and took Abraham’s work a step further, using his position to try to move the theology of the Church of the East back towards the moderate centre. He and his supporters showed a degree of sympathy towards the position taken at the Council of Chalcedon, and emphasised the teaching of Origen and John Chrysostom instead of the dogmas of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Such a challenge to the Theodoran christology of the Church of the East could not be tolerated. Without mentioning Hnana by name, the synod of 585 anathematised the ‘heretics’ who upheld Chalcedonian doctrines and dared to question Theodore’s orthodoxy. This condemnation stopped Hnana in his tracks. Hundreds of students left the School of Nisibis in search of a less controversial education elsewhere, and Hnana was effectively isolated.

In 590 Hormizd was deposed and killed in a palace coup and replaced by his son Khusro II (591–628). In the same year the war between Rome and Persia, which had degenerated into a series of indecisive campaigns in Arzun and the Tur ‘Abdin, took a startling turn. The Persian general Bahram Chobin, who had earlier risen in revolt against Hormizd, decided to make a bid for the throne. Khusro’s forces were defeated, and he fled for refuge into the territory

of the Roman Empire. He hoped for the sympathy of the emperor Maurice, who had an interest in upholding the principle of legitimate succession, but he also increased his chances of a favourable reception by exploiting rumours that he had become a Christian. Although Khusro certainly showed more interest in Christianity than any of his predecessors, it is extremely doubtful that he ever abandoned his Zoroastrian faith. Nevertheless, he now exploited his supposed conversion, recognising its value in conciliating support among the Romans. He also insisted that the Nestorian catholicus should accompany him in his flight. Isho'yahb, who was in a difficult and dangerous position whatever choice he made, decided to stay in Persia. It was not clear who would win the power struggle, and he had to consider the possible consequences to Persia's Christians if he openly supported Khusro. He therefore hid himself until the king was well on his way, enabling him to claim later that he had not received the royal command until it was too late to obey it. He then performed a delicate balancing act. As catholicus he was required to pray publicly for Bahram and he certainly did so, as it was later remembered against him. At the same time, he said nothing that could be construed as condemnation of Khusro. This pragmatic stance saved the Persian Church from persecution at Bahram's hands.

Khusro, hotly pursued by Bahram's soldiers, crossed the Roman frontier at Circesium. Safe in Roman territory, the Persian king made a public act of Christian worship at Sergiopolis, invoking the aid of the warrior saint Sergius and vowing the dedication of a golden cross studded with jewels in the event of his victory over the rebels. These demonstrations of sympathy towards Christianity won Khusro considerable goodwill in the Roman Empire, and the compliment to their favourite saint was particularly popular with the Arab mercenaries who now made up a large proportion of the Roman armies on the Persian frontier. Maurice agreed to send troops to suppress the rebels and restore Khusro to his throne, but demanded in return the cession of the Arzun district. Khusro had little choice but to agree. The Romans soon defeated Bahram and his supporters, and in 592 Khusro regained his crown. The Persian king immediately began to settle old scores, executing several noblemen who were either implicated in the murder of Hormizd or had collaborated with Bahram. The patriarch Isho'yahb was among the suspects who were required to defend their conduct, and according to the *Chronicle of Seert* convinced Khusro, albeit with some difficulty, that he had acted in good faith. The two men were formally reconciled, but Isho'yahb seems to have lost much of his influence with Khusro thereafter.

Isho'yahb I died in 595 and was succeeded as patriarch by the elderly Sabrisho^c I (596–604), bishop of Lashom in Beth Garmai and like his predecessor a graduate of the School of Nisibis. Sabrisho^c was widely renowned as a worker of miracles,

but was not put forward as a candidate in the patriarchal election of 596 because of his age and infirmity. He owed his election to the intervention of Khusro, who had been told by his Christian wife Shirin that the bishop of Lashom was no ordinary man. During the early years of his patriarchate Sabrisho^c was courted and flattered both by Khusro and by the Roman emperor Maurice. Khusro, doubtless at Shirin's behest, showered honours upon the Nestorian patriarch and his bishops. The prestige of the Christian faith in Persia had never been higher. Sabrisho's reign saw the Church of the East at its apogee. It was a golden age for the Nestorian Church, and all its leaders had to do to prolong this agreeable state of affairs indefinitely was to stay on Khusro's good side. Sadly, they were quite incapable of seeing where their true interests lay, and after Sabrisho's death in 604 squandered the goodwill he had built up during his reign in a foolish argument over the choice of his successor.

Khusro had regained his throne with Roman help, but the cession of Arzun rankled, and thereafter the Persian king was on the lookout for an opportunity to restore his prestige. Shortly afterwards Maurice and his sons were assassinated by the usurper Phocas. Khusro, on the pretext of avenging Maurice, declared war on the Roman Empire in 603. Rumours were rife that one of Maurice's sons, Theodosius, had escaped assassination and fled to Persia, and Khusro lent colour to his official justification for the war by staging a singular ceremony in which either Theodosius himself or a convenient lookalike was crowned emperor of the Romans by the Nestorian patriarch Sabrisho^c I. It would be interesting to know where Sabrisho^c found the order of service for this extraordinary occasion. The patriarch also prayed publicly for a Persian victory, and accompanied the Persian army on its first campaign. Khusro marched against the formidable fortress of Dara, which he took in 604 after a nine-month siege. Sabrisho^c did not live to see the fruits of the victory he had prayed for. He died of illness in the Persian siege lines around Dara shortly before the city's fall. When he first set out for the wars, a friend had congratulated him on his inclusion in Khusro's retinue at the start of such a promising campaign. 'Yes', the patriarch had replied complacently. 'I shall ride out on a donkey, but I shall return on a camel.' Ten months later the coffin containing his body was sent back to Persia—on a camel.

The Persians followed up their victory by a gradual advance deep into Roman Syria and Anatolia, which brought under their control more Roman territory than had ever before fallen to Persian arms. Khusro first took Edessa, which was betrayed to him by the Roman general Narses, who had been a friend of Maurice and could not forgive Phocas for his bloody seizure of power. At the same time a Persian force reached the Bosphorus at Chalcedon, and was able to invest Constantinople from the east. The imperial capital, with a strong garrison

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defending virtually impregnable fortifications, was safe enough so long as the Roman fleet controlled the sea, but the Roman armies were unable to prevent the Persians from overrunning the eastern provinces of the empire. In 611 the Persians took Antioch, in 613 Damascus, and in 614 Jerusalem. The holiest sites of Christendom fell into Persian hands, and with them countless Christian relics, including the True Cross itself, believed to have been unearthed miraculously by the empress Helena in the reign of Constantine. Phocas was overthrown by one of his lieutenants, Heraclius, in 610, but the new emperor was not yet strong enough to parry these thrusts. While Heraclius reorganised the Roman armies, the Persians moved south into Egypt and occupied Alexandria in 617.

During this period of Persian military success a number of Nestorian churches were established in Roman cities which had fallen to the Persians. Khusro expected his conquests to last, and set about remodeling Roman institutions in the occupied territories. Besides replacing Roman governors and civil officials with his own, he also removed Chalcedonian bishops from the dioceses of Mesopotamia and Syria, considering them to be too closely identified with Roman government, and supplied replacements for them from among the Christians of his own empire. Initially his preference was for clergy from the indigenous Church of the East, and a Nestorian bishop named Ahishma was appointed for Edessa, the chief city of Roman Osroene. As the Edessan Church was the centre and inspiration of the miaphysite movement in the Roman Empire, this appointment was deeply unpopular, and Khusro judged it best to modify his policy. He continued to insist that Roman churches should be placed in the hands of reliable Persian clergy, but allowed the miaphysite Christians of Mesopotamia to opt for a Persian Jacobite bishop if they would not accept a Nestorian. He also made it clear to the Christians in the occupied territories that they could either accept the new state of affairs or face either death or deportation to Persia. This mixture of firmness and flexibility ensured that there was little overt resistance to the new clergy, but Roman Christians naturally resented taking orders from Persian bishops, whether Jacobite or Nestorian. With the approval of the Persian authorities, the Jacobite Church devised a solution which soothed ruffled feelings all round. The Persian Jacobite bishops who sat in Roman cities were placed under the jurisdiction of a 'visitor-general of the East', who ranked second only to the patriarch himself in the Jacobite hierarchy, and a Roman bishop, Cyriacus of Amid, was appointed to this office. This neat manoeuvre satisfied the Romans by giving them a spokesman from their own Church, and won over the Persian Jacobites by according to their Church a higher status than it had previously enjoyed.

The Jacobite Challenge. Khusro showed considerable favour towards the Jacobites of Persia at this period, partly because he recognised that the Jacobite Church could play an important part in reconciling Christians in the occupied territories to Persian rule, but also because the Nestorian Church gratuitously offended him in its choice of a new patriarch after the death of Sabrisho^c I in 605. The Nestorian bishops originally chose the respected scholar Gregory of Kashkar, a staunch defender of the Theodoran christology. Khusro was approached, and gave his approval for Gregory's appointment. But Gregory's record as a zealot told against him. He had earlier been metropolitan of Nisibis and had harshly disciplined his diocese, helping to purge the influence of Hnana and his followers from the School of Nisibis and expelling monks whose orthodoxy was suspect from the local monasteries. In the end he had been deposed by Sabrisho^c I because of his excessive zeal, and several influential Christians in Khusro's service were not anxious to see a man of such firm convictions as patriarch. They persuaded Khusro's Christian queen Shirin to appoint another man, Gregory of Maishan, in his place. Perhaps because of the similarity of names, the king did not immediately realise that his wishes had been ignored, but Gregory of Maishan shamelessly used the patriarchate to enrich himself and his friends. He soon made important enemies, and Khusro was eventually informed of what had happened. Understandably, he was furious. 'Patriarch he is, and patriarch he shall remain, but never again will I allow another election,' he declared. Gregory died in 608, after a reign of only four years, and Khusro took the opportunity to make his displeasure clear. He imprisoned several of the late patriarch's intimates until they handed over the large sums of money Gregory had amassed during his short reign, and refused to allow a new patriarch to be appointed. Through its own folly, the Church of the East remained without a head for the next twenty years, until the appointment of Isho^cyahb II in 628.

The Jacobites were not slow to exploit this opportunity. They had two very influential supporters at Khusro's court. Shirin, the king's Christian wife, was a Jacobite, and so was his personal physician Gabriel of Shigar. Gabriel had originally been a Nestorian, but had been censured for bigamy by the patriarch Sabrisho^c I. Shortly before his death the patriarch refused a request from Khusro himself to lift the censure, and went to his grave unreconciled with the powerful court physician. The embittered Gabriel soon afterwards defected to the Jacobites. Rightly or wrongly, Sabrisho^c had made a very bad enemy for the Church of the East. During the next two decades Gabriel used all his influence with Khusro to frustrate the Nestorians and advance the affairs of the Jacobites.

In 612 the Jacobites tried to take over the Church of the East by proposing their own nominee to the vacant patriarchal throne. Khusro, who seems to have

believed that his best policy was to balance between the two Churches, was not prepared to go this far. However, he placated the Jacobites by arranging a theological debate at court between deputations from both sides. The Nestorian deputation was led by the metropolitans Yonadab of Adiabene and Shubhalmaran of Beth Garmai, and among its lesser luminaries was the future patriarch Isho'yahb II of Gdala, then bishop of Balad. Both men had made their names by attacking Hnana and his noxious Chalcedonian doctrines several years earlier. The debate, as might have been expected, was ill-tempered and inconclusive. The Nestorian delegation stoutly defended the christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, angrily repudiated the contentious term 'Mother of God' for Mary, and insisted that the Nestorian Church wore its name as a badge of pride. The Jacobites responded in kind. Khusro declared the contest a draw, and declined to appoint the Jacobite nominee; but he also refused to allow the Nestorians to fill the patriarchal vacancy themselves.

The eclipse of the Nestorians at court enabled the Jacobites to score off their old enemies. In particular, they were able to secure the replacement of Nestorian superiors by Jacobites in a number of important monasteries. Gabriel achieved a major success for the Jacobite Church by appointing a miaphysite superior, Zakkai, for the monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul, which had boldly stood up to Bar Sawma in the 480s. The monks of the monastery were now good Nestorians. After chafing for several months under Zakkai's attempts to indoctrinate them with his Severan views they eventually defected in a body, taking refuge in the Nestorian monastery of Rabban Bar 'Idta near 'Aqra. Zakkai replaced them with his own men. After the Jacobites established themselves in the monastery of Mar Mattai, they rapidly extended their influence to the villages of the Mosul plain. Alqosh, Beth Qopa and Batnaya remained Nestorian, but a number of neighbouring villages defected to the Severans. In the eastern Mosul plain the Jacobites established themselves in the monastery of Mar Behnam and about twenty neighbouring villages, some of which (Qaraqosh, Ba'shiqa, Bahzani and Bartallah) remain important Syrian Orthodox or Syrian Catholic centres to this day. One or two Nestorian villages close to Mosul and half a dozen monasteries near the Tigris remained loyal to the Church of the East.

Besides appointing their own superiors to monasteries, the Jacobites were also able to consecrate bishops for their congregations. They exploited this opportunity eagerly. Lists of the earliest Jacobite dioceses within the Persian Empire indicate that as far as possible they marked the Nestorian dioceses in Mesopotamia with dioceses of their own, just as they had earlier shadowed the Chalcedonian dioceses in the Roman Empire with a parallel hierarchy. They founded their own dioceses of Beth Nuhadra and Marga to consolidate the gains they had made around

Mosul, and also established dioceses for Tagrit, Shigar, Arzun, Beth Waziq and other localities in Mesopotamia and northern Arabia. The dioceses in northern Mesopotamia gave a high degree of overlap with the Nestorian congregations in the region.

Deprived of their official head, the Nestorians turned for leadership to Mar Babai, superior of the monastery of Mar Abraham of Kashkar on Mount Izla. Babai was a champion of the classic Theodoran theology of the Church of the East, and was appointed inspector of monasteries by the metropolitans of Beth Garmai, Adiabene and Nisibis. He campaigned vigorously against the growing doctrinal threat from three enemies: the Jacobites, the moderate faction associated with Hnana, and the Messallians, a sect of charismatics first attested towards the end of the fourth century. The Messallians seemed to look down on the sacraments and the traditional forms of Church order. They believed, or so their enemies said, that every man was possessed by an evil demon which could only be kept at bay by constant prayer. To find the time for prayer, they refused to work and wandered from city to city begging their daily bread. Understandably, these workshy heretics were not popular with the Church establishment. Babai warded off these various threats so successfully during his stewardship that, after the murder of Khusro in 628, he would certainly have been elected patriarch had he not declined to accept the dignity. Such was the respect in which he was held by the Nestorians that he was later remembered by them as 'Babai the Great'.

Under Babai's leadership, the Nestorians fought back violently against Jacobite encroachment in Beth Nuhadra and Marga. On one occasion the metropolitan Yonadab of Adiabene took an armed posse to hunt for Jacobites in Marga and apprehended Zakkai's lieutenant Nana, who was trying to win over the inhabitants of a small Nestorian village. Nana's Severan books were destroyed and he was daubed with soot and placarded. Fifty young stalwarts from the local Nestorian church schools then paraded him around the villages of the district, chanting insulting slogans. But despite this vigorous counterattack, the Nestorians were not able to regain the territory they had lost. The Nestorian diocese of Nineveh had been eviscerated by the Jacobite successes, and its few remaining villages were henceforth separated from the Nestorian communities of Beth Nuhadra by an intervening belt of hostile Jacobite villages. According to the seventh-century *History of Rabban Bar 'Idta*, only four villages within this Jacobite zone, including the important settlement of Karamlish, remained Nestorian.

The competition between the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches in Iraq was marked with real bitterness, and while it had its comic moments it also had moments of high tragedy. During a dispute with the Nestorians over the ownership of a monastery in Beth Lapat, Gabriel of Shigar accused the Nestorian

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monk Giwargis, one of the stars of the debate of 612, of being a convert from Zoroastrianism. The charge was correct. The Nestorian monk was the son of a high-ranking Persian official, who had changed his name from Mihrangushnasp to Giwargis at his baptism. The penalty for such an apostasy, as Gabriel well knew, was death, and Giwargis was arrested, tried, condemned to death and crucified in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in January 615 by the Persian authorities. If the leaders of either Church had been able to consult their own inclinations, Nestorians would have doubtless have been burned at the stake in Tagrit, and Jacobites in Nisibis. Fortunately, neither the Nestorians nor the Jacobites wielded any real political power. Gabriel was only able to procure the death of Giwargis because he had offended against the state religion of Zoroastrianism.

Khusro had won a series of remarkable victories against the Romans, but in 622 the tide began to turn against the Persians. The emperor Heraclius had been gradually bringing order out of the chaotic state into which the Roman Empire had fallen, and was at last ready to take action. Between 622 and 628 Heraclius neutralised the Avars and their Hun, Gepid, Bulgar and Scythian confederates in the west, and destroyed the threat from Persia once and for all. In a series of brilliant campaigns he defeated one Persian army after another, and brought Roman arms to the shores of the Caspian Sea. In 627 he swept down on the Fertile Crescent and advanced along the Tigris to meet the last Persian army remaining in the field. The Persians were decisively defeated near Nineveh, and in 628 Khusro was forced to abandon Seleucia-Ctesiphon itself. His subjects promptly revolted and put him to death. The new king, Kavadh II (628), was forced to sue for peace. The Persians agreed to restore all the Roman territories they had occupied and to return the holy relics seized in 614 after the capture of Jerusalem, including the fabled True Cross. This swift and unexpected Persian defeat placed in immediate jeopardy all Christians in Syria and Anatolia who had joined the Church of the East during the long years of Persian occupation. A church in Edessa, which had been administered by a Nestorian bishop since 611, was restored to the Jacobites in 628, and a Nestorian bishop who had been installed by the Persians in Damascus abandoned his diocese and returned to Persia when the city was evacuated by Kavadh's soldiers.

The Nestorian Recovery. At the same time, the peace with the Romans and the replacement of Khusro by a more tolerant king gave the Church of the East an opportunity to recover its former influence. Kavadh's brief reign ended the ascendancy of the Jacobites at the Persian court. Babai the Great died in 628 and the new king reversed the policy of his predecessor and finally allowed the Church of the East to elect a catholicus. The choice of the Persian bishops fell

unanimously on Isho'yahb of Gdala, bishop of Balad. In his youth, Isho'yahb had been one of the many students who left the School of Nisibis in protest against the Chalcedonian doctrines of its head Hnana. For several years thereafter he countered the baneful influence of Hnana's followers by teaching the approved Theodoran christology at a school in Balad, and in tribute to his orthodoxy was eventually elected bishop of Balad. He was one of the members of the Nestorian delegation which defended the christology of the Church of the East before Khusro in 612. When he was elected patriarch in 628, he was known to be both intelligent and shrewd. As events would demonstrate, he was prepared to compromise if he thought it was to his advantage.

The new patriarch took advantage of the presence of Heraclius in the east to lead a delegation to the Roman emperor in 630 to discuss the possibility of a reconciliation between the Roman and Persian Churches. The delegation included some of the most eminent figures in the Persian Church. The patriarch was accompanied by the metropolitans of Elam, Nisibis, Adiabene and Beth Garmai and by the bishops of Nineveh, Mahoze d'Arewan and Damascus. The latter was doubtless included in the delegation to emphasise the plight of the Nestorian communities that had been established on Roman soil during the Persian occupation. The Persian clerics were warmly received by Heraclius in Aleppo. Although little is known of the content of Isho'yahb's discussions with Heraclius, it is clear that he persuaded the emperor that, despite its traditional reverence for the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the doctrinal position of the Church of the East was perfectly orthodox. He was asked for his views on monotheletism, the doctrine of the single will recently espoused by the patriarchate of Constantinople, and responded with a confession of faith which was accepted by the Roman bishops. Two masses were then celebrated, one conducted by Isho'yahb according to the rite used by the Church of the East, in which both Heraclius and his bishops received the eucharist from his hands, and one according to the Chalcedonian rite. In his mass Isho'yahb omitted the customary references to the 'three doctors' Diodorus, Theodore and Nestorius, evidently hoping that the Romans would avoid any mention of Cyril of Alexandria in theirs; but his conciliatory gesture was not reciprocated by the Romans. On his return to Persia, Isho'yahb was accused by the bishop Bar Sawma of Susa of betraying his faith. The Roman bishops would never have admitted the Nestorians to communion, Bar Sawma declared, unless the patriarch had made damaging concessions during his brief sojourn on Roman soil.

The criticism directed against the patriarch Isho'yahb II, however, was as nothing compared to the storm of abuse that broke over the head of the bishop Sahdona of Mahoze d'Arewan. Sahdona, a native of the village of Halamun in

Beth Nuhadra, had studied theology in the monastery of Beth ʿAbe at the feet of its revered founder Rabban Yaʿqob. Confident in his prowess, and ignoring the warnings of his fellow delegates against careless talk with the enemy, he took every opportunity to debate with his hosts before the Persian and Roman delegates went their separate ways. The result was a highly unwelcome flash of insight. Sahdona listened carefully to what his opponents had to say, and announced on his return to Persia that both sides essentially held the same doctrines, but merely used different terminology to express them. Modern scholars are inclined to agree with Sahdona, but he was bitterly assailed by his old friend Ishoʿyahb, metropolitan of Adiabene, who had also served on the delegation. Ishoʿyahb, the son of a wealthy nobleman from the village of Kuphlana near Erbil, was a staunch dyophysite, and stoutly defended the confession of Theodore, Diodorus and Nestorius. For the next twenty years Ishoʿyahb attacked Sahdona's views, arguing vehemently that the language used by the Westerners was heretical. As Ishoʿyahb became patriarch himself in 649, his attitude was of great importance. Despite the attempts of moderates such as Hnana and Sahdona to find common ground between the Chalcedonians and the Nestorians, the terms of the debate were still set, on both sides, by men who were unwilling to compromise.

Four years later, the patriarch Ishoʿyahb II and his embattled opponents found themselves with something far more important to worry about than the precise number of persons, natures and hypostases in the incarnate Christ. In 634 the Sasanian frontier defences were overwhelmed by the Arabs. There had been frontier raids before, but there was something different about the latest incursion. The Arab warriors had fought with unusual skill and fervour, and were devoted to a new monotheistic religion, Islam. Within a generation they would bring down the Sasanian Empire and impose Muslim rule upon the squabbling Christians of Iraq. The history of the Church of the East was about to enter an entirely new phase.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

Tensions in the Metropolitan System. At the synod of Isaac in 410 most of the Mesopotamian dioceses of the Church of the East had been grouped into a province of the patriarch and five metropolitan provinces. Canon XXI of this synod had foreshadowed the extension of the metropolitan principle to the more remote dioceses in Fars, Khorasan and elsewhere, and Fars became a metropolitan province by 420. Three more metropolitan provinces were created during the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century. By 524 Merv was a

metropolitan diocese, and at the synod of Joseph in 554 was accorded seventh place in precedence, after the metropolitan of Fars. The diocese of Herat was raised to metropolitan status in or before 585, when the metropolitan Gabriel of Herat subscribed to the acts of the synod of Isho'yahb I, and during the reign of Isho'yahb II (628–45) the bishop of Hulwan also became a metropolitan.

The expansion of the Church of the East during the sixth century created a number of administrative problems. These were addressed at successive synods, which laid down rules to define the relationship between the patriarch and his metropolitans and to set out the powers and responsibilities of the various metropolitans. In essence, the problem was how to treat the recently-established metropolitan provinces. These were all far from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and their remoteness allowed the metropolitans of the Mesopotamian provinces to argue that it was impractical to give them a voice in important business. In reality, however, the issues at stake were the prestige of the old metropolitan dioceses and control of the Church's hierarchy. By the end of the sixth century, it was clear that the metropolitans of the traditional Mesopotamian provinces had, in practice if not in theory, won the battle for control of the Church.

It was decided at the synod of Aba I in 544 that participation in the election of a patriarch should be restricted to the metropolitans of Beth Huzaye, Maishan, Adiabene and Beth Garmai. The metropolitan of Nisibis was excluded from this cosy club because of the baneful memory of Bar Sawma, and the metropolitans of Fars and Merv for reasons of distance. The election would be conducted by the bishop of Kashkar, and the metropolitan of Beth Huzaye had to be there for the result to be valid. This synod, then, was a complete victory for the metropolitans of the Mesopotamian provinces, but it produced a reaction. In 554, at the synod of Joseph, it was agreed that every metropolitan should have the right to vote. The metropolitans of Fars and Merv were therefore admitted as electors. The synod made a concession to practicality by directing that, in a period of persecution, a patriarch could be enthroned with the consent of just two metropolitans. In 585, at the synod of Isho'yahb I, it was decided that at least three metropolitans were needed to elect a patriarch, persecution or no persecution. The synod also attempted to make the electoral process appear more democratic by permitting each metropolitan to attend an election accompanied by either two or three suffragan bishops. These suffragans could not vote, but they could make their views known before their superiors retired to cast their votes. Here, for the moment, things rested. In theory every metropolitan could vote for a patriarch. In practice it was rare for the metropolitans of Fars and Merv to journey to Seleucia-Ctesiphon for a patriarchal election. As a result, few of the Nestorian patriarchs and metropolitans in the sixth and seventh centuries were

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Persians. For the most part, they were 'Syrians', men who had been born and raised in northern Iraq.

These arrangements reflected the demography of the Church of the East. Although the dioceses of the Church of the East spread during the Sasanian period to include both the Iranian and non-Iranian territories of the Sasanian Empire, the densest areas of Christian settlement were, from earliest times, in northern Mesopotamia, in the districts included in the metropolitan provinces of Nisibis, Adiabene and Beth Garmai. The few references in the literary sources to the provinces of southern Mesopotamia (of which the most important is a section of the acts of the synod of Aba I in 544, which describes in some detail the patriarch's progress through the dioceses of Beth Aramaye, Beth Huzaye, Maishan and Fars in 540) refer almost without exception to urban communities. They sometimes mention monasteries, or the remote haunts of solitary monks, but they very rarely mention villages. The impression given by these sources is that most Christians in southern Mesopotamia lived either in the towns, or in monasteries, or as solitaries. In northern Mesopotamia, on the other hand, the sources name hundreds of villages, many of which still had Christian communities as late as the nineteenth century. Christian settlement was particularly dense in the provinces of Nisibis and Adiabene, but Beth Garmai also had a respectable number of Christian villages. These rural communities barely existed in Beth Aramaye or Maishan. It is surely significant that in southern Mesopotamia dioceses were named after towns (Rima, Karka d'Maishan), while in northern Mesopotamia they were named after rural districts (Beth Zabdai, Beth Bgash, Beth Nuhadra).

The Mesopotamian Provinces. In the patriarchal province of Beth Aramaye, three more dioceses were established in the later Sasanian period: Piroz Shabur (first mentioned in 486), Tirhan (first mentioned in 544) and Shenna d'Beth Ramman (first mentioned in 576). The city of Piroz Shabur on the Euphrates, founded in the third century and later renamed Anbar, faced Seleucia-Ctesiphon on the Tigris, and was linked to the Persian capital by a strategic waterway known as the 'Royal Canal'. It was an important administrative centre in the sixth century. Shenna d'Beth Ramman, also known as Qardaliabad, lay near the junction of the Lesser Zab and the Tigris rivers. The Tirhan district, which lay further to the southeast, consisted of the triangle of land between the Jabal Hamrin (known to the Nestorians as 'the mountain of Uruk') and the Tigris and Diyala rivers. All three dioceses were probably founded as a response to the growth of Jacobite influence in Beth Aramaye. Piroz Shabur and Shenna both had substantial Jacobite populations, and were later the seats of Jacobite bishops, while Tirhan was uncomfortably close to the main Jacobite centre of Tagrit.

The sixth century was a period of considerable turbulence for the Nestorian Christians of southern Arabia. Many Persian miaphysites, repelled by the adoption of the Theodoran christology by the Church of the East at the beginning of the century, fled from Persia and regrouped in Arabia, where they were not subject to either Roman or Sasanian direct rule. Jacobite influence in southern Arabia steadily grew, and the region's Nestorians were forced onto the defensive. However, events moved gradually in their favour as the century progressed. In Yemen, the kingdom of Himyar fell into the hands of a powerful Jewish dynasty towards the end of the fifth century, and in 522 the Jacobites of Najran were massacred by the Himyarite ruler Yusuf, a messianic visionary who sought to restore the kingdom of Israel on Arabian soil. Yusuf, nicknamed Dhu Nuwas, 'the man with curly hair', was defeated in his turn by an expeditionary force from Ethiopia, whose *negus* decided to intervene on behalf of threatened fellow-Christians. The Ethiopians installed a Christian dynasty in Himyar, which soon came to grief. In 552 the Himyarite king Abraha attempted to attack Mecca, but his army was destroyed by its ruling Quraysh tribe. The Meccans, mostly pagans at this period, were led by the grandfather of the prophet Muhammad. In 570 the Persian king Khusro I sent an army to Arabia which overthrew the decaying kingdom of Himyar and imposed direct Persian rule on Yemen. This intervention favoured the Nestorians rather than the Jacobites, and during the last few decades before the Arab conquest the Nestorians bolstered their position not only in Yemen but also in the Lakhmid vassal state of Hirta. Around 593 the Nestorian bishop Shem'on of Hirta converted the Lakhmid king No'man III to Christianity. Such was the favour shown to the Nestorians by No'man that when the patriarch Isho'yahb I died in Hirta in 596, his body was buried in a monastery founded by the king's daughter Hind. However, the Sasanian king Khusro II was not prepared to tolerate the rise of a Christian dynasty, even that of a friendly vassal state, so near his borders. In 602 he had the entire Lakhmid royal family killed, and broke up the kingdom into several provinces which were henceforth ruled directly by the Persians. Ironically, Khusro's ruthless elimination of this powerful Arabian client kingdom fatally weakened the Sasanian southern defences, paving the way for the Arab conquest a quarter of a century later.

The ecclesiastical administration of the southern provinces of Beth Huzaye and Maishan seems to have undergone little change during the sixth century. Bishops from the four dioceses in Maishan and the six dioceses in Beth Huzaye attested in the 420s attended most of the sixth-century synods. However, two new *ad hoc* dioceses had to be created in Beth Huzaye in the sixth century to resolve the problems created by the abusive consecration of bishops during the schism of Narsai and Elisha^c. At the end of the fifth century the district of Beth

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Mihraqaye (Mihraganqadaq) was part of the diocese of Ispahan. At some point before 554, possibly during the patriarchate of Aba I, the diocese was divided into two, doubtless because it had two bishops and neither was prepared to go quietly. In consequence, the acts of the synod of Ezekiel in 576 were signed by both the bishop Ahron of Ispahan and Papa of Mihraganqadaq. Mihraganqadaq is not reliably mentioned again as a separate diocese, and probably lapsed on Papa's death. Something similar seems to have happened at Ram Hormizd, where the patriarch Aba I discovered that a bishop had been abusively consecrated for 'Shurag, Ram Hormizd and other places' during the schism. This is the first mention of the diocese of Ram Hormizd, which seems to have been broken off from the diocese of Shushter. This opportunist bishop was removed by Aba I, and reluctantly resumed his duties as a humble priest, but the patriarch was unable to suppress the new diocese altogether. Two later bishops of Ram Hormizd attended the synods of Ezekiel in 576 and Isho'yahb I in 585, and the diocese probably lapsed shortly after the Arab conquest.

For most of the fifth century the province of Nisibis had only three stable suffragan dioceses, for Arzun, Beth Zabdai and Qardu. In the final century and a half of Sasanian rule three new regular dioceses were founded, in the Beth 'Arbaye district between Mosul and the Tigris and Khabur rivers and in the hill country to the northeast of Arzun. By 497 there was a diocese for Balad (modern Eski Mosul) on the Tigris. Balad had a significant Jacobite population in the sixth century, and the diocese was probably created after heretical tendencies began to appear within its Nestorian community. By 563 there was also a diocese for the town of Shigar (modern Sinjar), another notorious nest of Severans. By 585 a diocese had also been established for Beth Kartwaye, the territory of the Kartaw Kurds who inhabited the country to the west of Lake Van. This was not a notable area of Jacobite settlement, and the new diocese, whose full name was 'Beth Tabyathe and the Kartwaye', perhaps reflected an attempt to spread Christianity among the pagans of the Arzun uplands. If so, these modern-day Kurds must have been less ferocious than their ancestors, who had unmercifully harried Xenophon's Ten Thousand in these same hills nearly ten centuries earlier. All three dioceses persisted into the Umayyad period. The diocese of Aoustan d'Arzun is last mentioned in 554, when its bishop Natum attended the synod of Joseph, and seems to have lapsed before the Arab conquest.

In the metropolitan province of Adiabene the established dioceses of Erbil, Beth Nuhadra, Beth Bgash and Beth Dasen continued uneventfully into the Umayyad period. By the end of the sixth century the diocese of Hnitha, which had lapsed during the persecution of Shapur II, had been revived, and two more dioceses had been founded, one for the town of Hdatta (Haditha) near the

confluence of the Tigris and Great Zab rivers, and a second for Nineveh, on the east bank of the Tigris near the site of modern Mosul. The dioceses of Hnitha, Hdatta and Nineveh are first mentioned in 497, 595 and 554 respectively. The revival of the diocese of Hnitha, sometimes called Ma'altha after the district's chief town, probably reflected growing Christian settlement in the 'Aqra region, but the dioceses of Hdatta and Nineveh were almost certainly created to counter the growing influence of the Jacobites in the Mosul district. The threat from the Jacobites may also explain the appearance of the ephemeral diocese of 'Ain Sipne, whose bishop Bar Sahde was present at the synod of Ezekiel in 576. 'Ain Sipne is probably to be identified with the village of 'Ain Sifni near Alqosh, which beat off the threat from the Jacobites and had a Nestorian community as late as the thirteenth century, after which it was taken over by the Yezidis. A diocese was also founded for Adarbaigan towards the end of the fifth century, several of whose bishops attended the sixth-century synods. The diocese was centred on the town of Ganzak to the southeast of Lake Urmia, and probably covered the same territory as the Sasanian province of Atropatene. By the eighth century Adarbaigan was a suffragan diocese in the province of Adiabene, but during the Sasanian period it seems to have been an independent diocese.

There were seven dioceses in Beth Garmai at the end of the fifth century: the metropolitan diocese of Karka d'Beth Slokh (Kirkuk), and the suffragan dioceses of Shahrgard, Lashom, Mahoze d'Arewan, Hrbath Glal, Tahal and Karme. By the middle of the sixth century there were also dioceses for Shahrzur and Barhis. Bishops of Shahrzur were present at the synods of 554 and 605, and bishops of Barhis at the synods of 544, 576 and 605. 'Barhis' is probably to be identified with the district of Bahrin near Tagrit, which had a Jacobite bishop on the eve of the Arab conquest. If so, the demise of the Nestorian diocese of Barhis may have been connected with the spread of miaphysitism in the districts around Tagrit. The Nestorians of Beth Garmai came under considerable pressure from the Jacobites during the first half of the seventh century, and the province's bishops were not always sound. The attempts by Sahdona, bishop of Mahoze d'Arewan, to find common ground with the Chalcedonians scandalised the Nestorians, and he was not the only man to have doubts. Shahrzur was a Jacobite stronghold, and its Nestorian bishop Yazdpanah defected to the Jacobites shortly before the Arab conquest. The Nestorian dioceses of Karme and Barhis, uncomfortably close to Jacobite Tagrit, also lapsed at around this time. The last Nestorian bishops of Barhis and Karme, Paul and Gabriel, are attested in 605 and 616 respectively. By 629 Karme and Bahrin were both the seats of Jacobite bishops.

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Iran, Northern Arabia, Central Asia and India. The literary sources make very few references to the bishops of the metropolitan province of Fars at this period, but there is no reason to doubt that the five mainland dioceses (Rev Ardashir, Istakhr, Bih Shapur, Ardashir Khurra and Darabgird) and the four northern Arabian dioceses (Beth Mazunaye, Mashmahig, Dairin and Hagar) attested in the fifth century continued to flourish in the sixth century. The Christian communities in Fars were even reinforced from time to time in the sixth century by deportations of Roman Christians, victims of the continuing wars between the Roman and Sasanian empires. Among the signatories of the acts of the synod of Joseph in 554 was the metropolitan Claudian of Fars, who represented the Christians of 'the New Town' (*maboza bdatta*), evidently a colony of Roman Christians recently planted in Rev Ardashir. In the middle decades of the sixth century a diocese also existed for Qish, a trading port on the sea route to India on an island in the Persian Gulf midway between Rev Ardashir and Hormuz. The diocese probably owed its existence to trade rather than the chances of warfare, and its Christian community probably consisted for the most part of merchants and pearl fishermen. Only one bishop of Qish is known, David, who accompanied the patriarch Aba I during his visitation to the dioceses of Fars in 544. A fifth northern Arabian diocese, Hatta, is also mentioned in the acts of a regional synod held at Dairin in 676. Located on the Arabian coast not far from Dairin, it was previously part of the diocese of Hagar, and was probably founded just before the Arab conquest.

By the end of the sixth century there were at least three Nestorian dioceses in western Iran. Bishops of the established dioceses of Hamadan and Beth Lashpar (Hulwan) attended most of the synods held between 486 and 605, and bishops of Masabadan (modern Shirvan) were also present at the later synods. In northern Iran bishops of Rai, Paidangaran, 'Amol and Gilan' and Gurgan adhered to the acts of several of the sixth-century synods. Judging by the name of the bishop Za'ura of Gurgan, who was present at the synod of Ezekiel in 576, Gurgan's fifth-century Christian deportees from the Roman Empire had by now been completely integrated into the Church of the East. The dioceses of Paidangaran (modern Baylaqan) and Amol and Gilan were transient creations. Only two bishops of Paidangaran are known, from 544 and 554 respectively. The diocese of Amol and Gilan, covering the coastal plain of the Dailam region on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, had only a single recorded bishop, Surin, who was present at the synod of Joseph in 554. In later centuries, notably during the reign of the patriarch Timothy I (780–823), further attempts were made to evangelise the Dailam region, but they had little more success than this first, abortive, mission.

The gains made by the Nestorians in Khorasan and Segestan during the fifth century were gradually reversed in the sixth century. At first, things seemed

to go well. Sometime in the first quarter of the sixth century Merv became a metropolitan province. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, the metropolitan David of Merv helped to precipitate the schism of Narsai and Elisha^c by consecrating Elisha^c in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 524. This controversial intervention soon had consequences for the Christians of the province of Merv. The diocese of Segestan was disputed between two rival bishops in the 520s and 530s, and the patriarch Aba I resolved matters in 544 by temporarily dividing it, assigning Zarang, Farah and Qash to the bishop Yazdaphrid and Bist and Rukut to the bishop Sargis. He also ordered that the diocese should be reunited as soon as one of these bishops died. Besides confirming that some of the dioceses in the mission field were of enormous size (Segestan must have covered the entire Sasanian administrative province of that name), this incident also demonstrates how vulnerable their communities were to misgovernment. The stability of the Nestorian communities in Khorasan and Segestan was further undermined by the deportation of tens of thousands of Jacobite Christians from Antioch to Segestan in 540. The incomers, with their repellent Severan christology, represented a dangerous threat to Nestorian orthodoxy, and the Church of the East responded by raising the diocese of Herat to metropolitan status and by founding at least four new dioceses. The province of Merv was ranked seventh in precedence, after Fars, at the synod of Joseph in 554, and Herat was also the seat of a metropolitan by 585. Bishops of 'Abiward and Shahr Piroz' and Merv-i Rud subscribed to the acts of the synod of Joseph in 554, while a bishop of Pusang adhered by proxy to the decisions of the synod of Isho'yahb I in 585. None of these three Nestorian dioceses is mentioned again, and any gains made by the Nestorians in the final decades of the sixth century must have been wiped out in the 620s, when Khusro II deported thousands of Jacobite Christians from Edessa to Khorasan and Segestan. The new arrivals demanded their own bishops, and the maphrian Marutha took advantage of the temporary eclipse of the Nestorians at court by consecrating Jacobite bishops for Herat and Segestan. The Church of the East was now on the defensive in Khorasan and Segestan.

By the middle of the sixth century the influence of the Church of the East had spread beyond the frontiers of the Sasanian Empire. A passage in the acts of the synod of Aba I in 544 refers to Nestorian communities in 'every district and every town throughout the territory of the Persian Empire, in the rest of the East, and in the neighbouring countries'. In 549 the patriarch Aba I created a diocese for the Hephthalite Huns, who had settled along the eastern frontiers of the Sasanian Empire in the Bactrian territories that had earlier been part of the Kushan Empire. This was almost certainly the diocese of 'Badisi and Qadistan', whose bishop Gabriel adhered by proxy to the decisions of the synod of

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Isho'yahb I in 585. If, as its name implies, this diocese was centred on the Badghis region of northwest Afghanistan, it was probably assigned to the newly-established metropolitan province of Herat. There had been Christians in Bactria as early as the third century, and their sixth-century successors were probably thickest on the ground in this region. The diocese of Badisi is not again mentioned, and it is not clear how long it survived. However, a rare Roman reference confirms that Christianity was well established among the Huns by the end of the sixth century. In 591, after putting down Bahram Chobin's rebellion, Khusro sent the Roman emperor Maurice several Hunnic prisoners from the defeated army. They were Christians, who had tattooed their foreheads with the sign of the cross, and this symbol had saved their lives. Khusro refrained from beheading them along with the rest of Bahram's followers, because he knew that Maurice would be interested to know that Christians could be found as far east as the Oxus.

The main significance of the conversion of the Hephthalites was not that it enabled the Nestorians to establish a little-known diocese in Bactria, but that it gave them the opportunity to cross the Oxus river and lay the foundations for their later missionary expansion into Central Asia. The base for this expansion was Merv, the fortified capital of the Sasanian province of Margiana and an important station along the Silk Road. From Merv the roads led west to Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Antioch, and east to China. It was not yet possible to follow the Silk Road all the way to China, as the roads east of Kashgar were unsafe, but on the eve of the Arab conquest there were certainly Nestorian communities in Bukhara, Balkh and Samarqand, even if they did not yet have bishops. For the moment the Nestorians were confined to the region between the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers; but in the seventh century their missionaries would follow the Silk Road to its end, preaching the Christian message not only among the rude Turkish tribes of Central Asia but also in Ch'ang-an (Sian), the sophisticated capital of T'ang China.

The Nestorian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes, who visited the Christians of India around 520 and later wrote an account of his travels, the *Christian Topography*, mentioned that there were Christians in the trading port of Calliana, from which brass, sisam logs and cloth were exported, and 'in the land called Male, where the pepper grows'. Both references are to the Malabar Coast, and Cosmas's 'Calliana' is surely to be identified with the port of Quilon. Cosmas also mentioned a small and unimportant Christian trading settlement on the island of Ceylon (Sielediva), surrounded by pagans. It is unlikely that there were still Christians in Taxila at this period, but there may well have been Nestorian settlements elsewhere in the Punjab, around the port of Tana near Bombay, on the sea route from Maishan and Fars to the Malabar Coast. The Nestorians of northwest India were first noticed in the fourteenth century, when their numbers were very small, but their

communities may well have been founded centuries earlier. However, if there were Christians in northwest India in the sixth century, Cosmas was not aware of their existence. According to Cosmas, the Christians of Calliana had a bishop appointed from Fars, while the trading post in Ceylon had a Persian priest. These references confirm that the Malabar Coast had by now emerged as the only significant area of Syriac Christian settlement in India, and that the Malabar Christians were dependent on the Nestorian metropolitan province of Fars, whose Christians also claimed Saint Thomas as their founding father. The connection with Fars went back at least as far as the late fifth century, when the metropolitan Ma'na of Rev Ardashir, noted for his translations of Syriac hymns into Persian for use among the Persian-speaking congregations of Fars, sent copies of his translations of Greek devotional works to India for the use of the Indian clergy.

Cosmas also mentioned that the island of Dioscoris (Soqatra) in the Indian Ocean contained 'a multitude of Christians' in the sixth century. Intriguingly, these Christians spoke Greek, but they were subject to a bishop and priests appointed from Persia. Cosmas claimed that the Christians of Soqatra were the descendants of a Greek colony implanted by the Ptolemies of Egypt, but they are more likely to have been Roman captives deported to Soqatra by one or other of the Sasanian kings. The Nestorians of Soqatra, like the Nestorians of India, seem to have been dependent on the metropolitans of Fars.

In the first quarter of the seventh century, during the Persian occupation of Syria and Palestine, a Nestorian diocese was established for Damascus, which had fallen to the Persians in 613. The new diocese was included in the province of Nisibis and its first bishop, Yohannan, is attested in 630. His title, significantly, was 'bishop of the scattered of Damascus'. Damascus was reoccupied by the Romans in 628, and the detested Nestorians who had colonised the city during the Persian occupation were immediately evicted and forced to take refuge in Sasanian territory. Yohannan was included in the Nestorian delegation which met Heraclius in Aleppo in 630, and doubtless begged for permission to return to Damascus with his flock. Heraclius is unlikely to have agreed, but within a few years the Arab conquest gave the 'scattered' the opportunity to return to Damascus in triumph.

MONASTICISM

Abraham of Kashkar's Revival. During the second half of the fifth century and the earlier part of the sixth century there was a movement away from monasticism in Iraq. Bar Sawma, Acacius and Babai had done their best to encourage all

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clerics to marry, and celibacy was no longer a fashionable ideal in the Church of the East. This movement was reversed in the second half of the sixth century by Abraham of Kashkar (502–97), who revived monasticism in the Church of the East almost single-handedly. After studying at Nisibis, Abraham converted some of the pagan Arabs of Hirta. He then visited the monasteries of Sinai and Egypt, and was so impressed by the ordered monastic life he saw there that he returned to Mesopotamia and did his best to recreate it in the Sasanian Empire. He either built or restored the so-called ‘Great Monastery’ on Mount Izla, which was henceforth also known by his name, and gathered round himself a group of monks who were willing to submit themselves to a stricter than usual rule. Abraham composed a set of rules for his monks, which has survived, but they were little more than pious statements of principle. It was left to the more practical Dadisho^c, who succeeded Abraham as superior of the Great Monastery on his death in 597, to develop a set of detailed directions for life in a monastery. The new rules soon bedded in. The Nestorian ascetic Abraham of Nathpar helped to win wider acceptance for them in the monasteries of the Church of the East and his disciple Rabban Job, a Persian Christian from Rev Ardashir in Fars, translated them from Syriac into Persian, thereby ensuring their dissemination beyond the Church of the East’s Mesopotamian heartland.

Nestorian monks who followed Abraham’s rules wore a tunic, a belt, a cloak, a hood and sandals. They shaved the top of their head in a tonsure, but also grew their beards. This combination distinguished them both from monks in the Roman Empire, who shaved the whole head, and from Jacobite monks, who left a growth of hair in the shape of a cross on their scalps. Initially, Abraham’s monks met for common prayer seven times a day, but the frequency was later reduced to four times. They were vegetarians, and ate only once a day, at noon. Celibacy was enforced in the Nestorian monasteries, with varying degrees of success, and conscientious superiors tried to keep women and boys as far away from their charges as possible. Many monks worked on the land, but the brighter ones were set to the more agreeable employment of copying manuscripts. After three years a monk could, if his superior agreed, retire to absolute solitude as a hermit. In the Roman Empire monasteries were usually self-sufficient, but in Persia they were normally subject to the oversight of the local bishop, who expected his cut of their produce. Where possible, Nestorian monasteries sought to place themselves under the direct authority of the patriarch, who was unlikely to be quite as rapacious as his bishops.

New Monastic Foundations. Abraham of Kashkar encouraged the spread of monasteries, and the second half of the sixth century saw the foundation of

a number of important monasteries by his students. Rabban Bar ʿIdta, a native of the Roman town of Sergiopolis just across the border from Persia, who had been placed with Abraham as a child after the death of his parents, founded the monastery that bears his name in the Marga district during the reign of the patriarch Ezekiel (570–81). A few years later, during the reign of Hormizd IV (579–90), the monk Eliya of Hirta founded the monastery of Mar Eliya near Mosul, often known by its Arabic name Deir Saʿid. Several other monasteries were founded by admirers of Abraham, including the monastery of Rabban Shabor near the city of Shushter in Beth Huzaye.

Several other Nestorian monasteries were founded around 590, in the wake of a spectacular falling-out among the monks of the monastery of Mar Abraham of Kashkar. The imperious Babai the Great (569–628), the monastery's third superior, drove out a number of monks who had taken wives or concubines. The ninth-century historian Thomas of Marga, who related the story in some embarrassment in his *Book of Governors*, claimed that Babai had not been aware of anything amiss until another monk forcibly drew his attention to the nurseries that had sprung up around the monastery for the convenience of the women and their babies. The exiled monks responded by founding monasteries of their own in various parts of Mesopotamia. Many of these monasteries failed to stay the course, but several, including the monastery of Mar Yohannan the Egyptian near Fenek and the monastery of Mar Giwargis near the village of Telkepe in the Mosul plain, would have a long and illustrious existence.

Some of the new monasteries were built close to the Roman border. During the sixth century the growing hostility between the Nestorians and the Jacobites gave the border an ideological significance that had not hitherto existed. The northern Tigris, for two centuries the frontier between the Roman and Persian Empires, now became also the frontier between the opposed Nestorian and Jacobite christologies. Both sides built monasteries as close to the frontier as they could, both to assert their own power and to discourage their enemies, and this competition centred around the plateau of Mount Izla, an uncomfortable Roman salient poking into Persian territory. Mount Izla was surrounded on three sides by Persian territory, and bordered on the Nestorian dioceses of Arzun, Qardu and Nisibis. The 'Great Monastery' of Mar Abraham of Kashkar lay just to the north of the frontier, on the northern slopes of the mountain. Close by was the monastery of Mar Awgin, another important Nestorian foundation, named after the mythical founder of monasticism in Iraq. The main plateau, however, was a Jacobite stronghold. Early in the sixth century its defences were strengthened, and the vulnerable Roman salient was heavily garrisoned and protected by a ring of fortresses. Dara, the lynchpin of these defences, only fell to the Persians in 604

after a nine-month siege. These Roman fortresses made Mount Izla the safest spot on the frontier, both in peace and war, and encouraged the Jacobites to build their own monasteries on the plateau. The most important Jacobite foundation was the monastery of Mar Gabriel, widely known as Qartmin Abbey. So many Jacobite monks came to live on Mount Izla in God's service that it was eventually given its present name, Tur 'Abdin, 'the mountain of servants'. The monasteries of the Church of the East across the border in Persia could be clearly seen from Qartmin Abbey, but the Jacobites, protected by Roman soldiers and Roman fortresses, could contemplate their enemies with impunity.

One of the new Nestorian foundations would eventually become one of the most celebrated monasteries of the Church of the East. The monastery of Beth 'Abe in the Marga district, not far from the modern village of Kherpa near 'Aqra, was founded in 595 by the monk Ya'qob. Ya'qob was not implicated in the scandal of 590, but had been severely criticised by Babai for failing to control the monks under his care. Five years later, after living for some time in the mountains as a recluse, he quarrelled irrevocably with the overbearing Babai, left the monastery of Mar Abraham, assembled some of the exiled monks and founded the monastery of Beth 'Abe, becoming its first superior. The monastery of Beth 'Abe flourished greatly under Ya'qob, and was exempted from the jurisdiction of the local bishop by the patriarch Isho'yahb II. During the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries it supplied many of the bishops of the Church of the East, and was still flourishing in the thirteenth century. It was the subject of one of the more entertaining and interesting Nestorian monastic histories, the ninth-century *Book of Governors* of Thomas of Marga.

Several more important monasteries were founded in the first half of the seventh century. The monk Khudahwi of Maishan, who studied in the recently-established monastery of Rabban Shabor near Shushter, founded the monastery of Beth Hale near Hdatta, and his friend Mar 'Abda of Hirta built the monastery of Gamre nearby. Khudahwi's disciple Ezekiel attached himself to Yohannan of Beth Garmai, the second superior of the monastery of Beth 'Abe, and the two men jointly founded the monastery of Mar Ezekiel to the southeast of Daquqa in Beth Garmai. This monastery was still flourishing at the end of the thirteenth century, long after the demise of Christianity in many other parts of Beth Garmai, and survived into the sixteenth century. The monk Rabban Sabrisho' of Athor founded the monastery of Beth Qoqa near Erbil, which was briefly besieged by the Arabs during their invasion of Adiabene in the 640s. In or around 625, on the very eve of the Arab conquest, the monk Rabban Hormizd the Persian, one of Bar 'Idta's disciples, founded the famous monastery that bears his name in the mountains to the north of the village of Alqosh. The monastery of Rabban

Hormizd, one of the few surviving monasteries of the Church of the East, became the sepulchre of the Nestorian patriarchs in the fifteenth century and was the scene of a remarkable monastic revival in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

The History of Rabban Bar‘Idta. The flavour of life in the Nestorian monasteries in the hills of Adiabene during the late Sasanian period has been vividly captured in *The History of Rabban Bar‘Idta*, a verse paraphrase by a monk named Abraham of a contemporary life of Bar ‘Idta written by Yohannan of Beth Garmai, the author of a number of inspirational biographies of Nestorian ascetics. Yohannan’s biography of Bar ‘Idta has not survived, but Abraham’s verse paraphrase was translated into English by E A Wallis Budge in 1902. Bar ‘Idta, who died in 628 at the ripe old age of 103, was born in the Roman city of Sergiopolis near the Euphrates, the centre of the cult of the martyr Sergius, but grew up just across the Persian border in the Great Monastery on Mount Izla, where he was placed as a child by his sister after the sudden death of their parents. Here the young orphan was doubtless given his name, which means ‘son of the Church’. The *History* gives delightful glimpses of Bar ‘Idta’s adolescence. He was sensitive about his Roman origins and accent, and was gently teased by Abraham of Kashkar for his rusticity. But Abraham also recognised his talents. He encouraged him to learn by heart the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, a pseudonymous tract written by the exiled Nestorius in which he persuasively defended his theological position. This text had just become available in Persia in a Syriac translation from the original Greek. Bar ‘Idta read aloud so well that Abraham asked him to read the nightly lessons every Monday, when his fine delivery helped to keep his weary fellow monks awake. He spent much of his adult life with Abraham, remaining in the Great Monastery until he was 53. In 578, during the reign of the patriarch Ezekiel (570–81), he and two other monks were sent out to different districts of Mesopotamia, each with a commission to found a monastery for the defence of the Nestorian theology.

Bar ‘Idta, accompanied by nine other monks, went to the district of Marga, the modern ‘Aqra district. The monks crossed the desert of Beth ‘Arbaye by the Royal Road between Nisibis and Balad, breaking their arduous journey with stays at monasteries and in Christian villages along the route. They then crossed the Tigris into Beth Nuhadra and made their way through Athor into Marga. Bar ‘Idta found a suitable site for his monastery in the hills just to the west of ‘Aqra. The site was near to a source of fresh water and close enough to the treeline for firewood to be collected easily, but not so high up that lions, wolves and snakes became a danger. The construction of the new monastery was a cooperative effort. Abba Joseph, the superior of the monastery of Tabya (‘the gazelle’), a recent Nestorian foundation which lay on the Tigris, close to the Royal Road,

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recruited several dozen able-bodied men from the nearby villages of Athor for the hard labour of building, lent Bar ʿIdta some of his own monks for as long as he needed them, and gave the monks a camel for carrying supplies and grinding corn. The camel was a welcome and valuable gift indeed, sparing the monks some of the more arduous tasks of a farming community.

Monasteries were often welcomed by the locals for the benefits they could bring a rural community, and Bar ʿIdta's monastery was no exception. He and his companions were often asked to undo the mischief caused by evil spirits, and the men of the nearby villages also brought their sick, both humans and animals, to Bar ʿIdta for healing. The monastery also attracted the patronage of a number of influential local officials, including Ukbe, the Sasanian governor of Athor. Bar ʿIdta cured a disease which was destroying his herd of camels, and he showed his gratitude by presenting the monastery with a second camel. Like the first, it was a gift which meant a lot to hard-working monks. The monks also accepted a substantial gift of land from Zandaprokh, the doting father of one of the monastery's inmates, and also accepted charity from other wealthy Christians in the district. On one occasion they owed their survival as a community to gifts of food from their wealthy friends, after a plague of locusts destroyed the wheat crop and caused a famine in the region. The monks had been subsisting for weeks on a diet of locusts, and Bar ʿIdta had to force them to share the food with starving Christians in the neighbouring villages.

The monastery's monks displayed a variety of backgrounds and personalities. Yazdad was a convert from Zoroastrianism. Zakkai had been tortured by the magi in his youth, and was greatly honoured because he had refused to deny his Christian faith. Emmanuel, a handsome deacon from a nearby village, was struggling to preserve his chastity. His brother's attractive wife was trying to seduce him, and he had sought shelter in the monastery to escape from a temptation that was daily becoming stronger. Yonan loved wild animals, and would wander off into the mountains to coax lions, foxes and gazelles to eat from his hand. One temporary lodger at the monastery was a Nestorian bishop who had fled there for refuge after seducing a beautiful female parishioner. When the coast was clear, and after a suitable period of penance, he returned to his diocese. Although Bar ʿIdta's biographer withheld its name, ostensibly to preserve the penitent's incognito, he mentioned that the bishop had the unusual name of Yazdpanah. From this calculated disclosure, his readers could identify him as the bishop of Shahrzur in Beth Garmai, the only diocese in northern Mesopotamia held by a man of that name at that time. The explanation for this surprising frankness is not far to seek. Yazdpanah turned his coat in 630, shortly before the *History* was completed, and was appointed Jacobite bishop of Shahrzur. Bar ʿIdta's biographer

could not resist the temptation to name and shame the defector, but like most muck-rakers he was careful to claim that he had maintained the highest standards of journalistic integrity.

Bar 'Idta's finest moment came when he prevented the monastery from being pillaged by Roman soldiers. In the campaign of 623 a detachment of Heraclius's army advanced into Athor in pursuit of a defeated Persian force. The incursion, which was accompanied by burning and looting, caused panic among the Persian civilian population, which had never endured the presence of a hostile Roman army before. Bar 'Idta's monastery was on the Roman line of march, and there was a tense encounter when a scouting force of cavalry approached. Large churches and convents offered tempting prospects of loot for a marauding army, and the monks were understandably terrified when the Roman horsemen, 'like eagles', fanned out to surround the monastery. The Romans carried a cross for their standard, and Bar 'Idta went out to parley with their officer, a captain named Leo. For once, the Persian monk's Roman origin was an asset. He made common cause with the Roman commander, appealing to their shared Christianity and pointing out that, as a Roman by birth, he was as much a foreigner in Persia as Leo was himself. These arguments may have carried some weight, but an accompanying 'gift' of 50 pieces of gold probably carried more. The monastery was spared, and Leo left some of his men to protect it from further extortion. He asked the Persian monks to pray for a Roman victory in the war, and they assured him of their good wishes. Evidently, despite the public position taken a few years previously by the patriarch Sabrisho' I, some Persian Christians still had qualms as to their ultimate loyalty when their country was at war with Christian Rome.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Greek Influence on Syriac Literature. During the later Sasanian period the literature of all the Syriac-speaking Churches came under considerable Greek influence. The triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire conferred enormous status on the Christian literature that had been produced in the previous three centuries, most of which had been composed in Greek. Whereas Ephrem and Aphrahat had expressed their thought in a Semitic idiom almost free of Hellenisms, later Syriac writers increasingly introduced Greek loanwords into their texts. The first Syriac writers to deploy Greek phraseology were those living in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, but the trend soon spread to writers of the Church of the East, doubtless through conduits such as the schools of Edessa and Nisibis. There are indications that, on both sides of the border, the use of Greek by

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Syriac-speaking Christians was confined to the educated classes. While the Church of the East used Greek loanwords for the names of its higher clergy (*episqopa* for bishop, *mitropolita* for metropolitan, and *qatoliqa* for patriarch), it retained Semitic terms for the lower clergy (*qashisha* for priest and *mshamshana* for deacon). The christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, which stimulated the translation of Greek texts into Syriac, also reinforced the dominance of Greek, forcing Syriac writers to import Greek technical terms into Syriac to meet the need for precision in theological disputation. Syriac writers could no longer get away with saying that God had 'put on' humanity, like a man putting on a cloak; or that the human and divine natures were 'mingled' in the incarnate Christ. Syriac rapidly developed a technical language of its own, but its terms were not always coextensive with their Greek equivalents. One reason why Westerners considered the Church of the East heretical was that its classic christological formula, that Christ was incarnate in two natures (*kyane*), two hypostases (*qnome*) and one person (*parsopa*), was open to misunderstanding because the Syriac term *qnama* did not exactly render the sense of the Greek word *hypostasis*. The search for precision also influenced Syriac translation techniques. Whereas the early Syriac writers were often more concerned to translate the sense of a scriptural passage than its literal meaning, the sixth-century writers found that the best way of avoiding the attentions of the heresy-hunters was to render sensitive Greek texts into Syriac word for word. This deleterious habit spread, and for three centuries pedantic word-for-word translation from Greek to Syriac became the norm. It was only in the middle of the ninth century that Nestorian translators resumed the practice of translating the sense rather than the meaning. By then, they were translating from Syriac into Arabic, not from Greek into Syriac, and had to satisfy the requirements of demanding Arab patrons who wanted to read for pleasure as well as instruction.

History and Pseudo-History. The sixth century saw the emergence of the first histories of the Church of the East. As the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs* demonstrate, some Christians had felt the impulse to chronicle its glorious deeds as early as the fourth century; but it was not until the sixth century that the first recognisable histories emerged. The development of this genre was doubtless influenced by Greek models, as Syriac literature in all its forms came under Greek influence at this period; and it was probably also stimulated by the unwelcome growth of Jacobite influence in the Sasanian Empire. The Nestorians needed to defend and explain their past. Several historians are known to have flourished during the last century of Sasanian rule, including Shem'on of Beth Garmai, who translated into Syriac a Greek chronography that dated important events in the

history of the Christian Church with reference to the chronology established by Eusebius of Caesarea; and Barhadbshabba, bishop of Hulwan, the author of a surviving *History of the Holy Fathers Persecuted for the Truth*, a defence of the record of the Church of the East during the christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries. Barhadbshabba of Hulwan, a graduate of the School of Nisibis, is almost certainly to be identified with his namesake and fellow-student Barhadbshabba 'Arbaya, who wrote *The Causes of the Foundation of Schools*, a history of the Schools of Edessa and Nisibis. Given its controversial subject, this lost work was probably also written with a polemical intent. In the seventh century Babai the Great, a man who relished controversy, was the author of lost biographies of Diodorus of Tarsus and the Nestorian monastic reformer Abraham of Kashkar. Nevertheless, while committed writers like Barhadbshabba and Babai took on the Jacobites, less engaged historians confined themselves to traditional pursuits, such as recording the acts of prominent martyrs. Although persecutions by the Persian authorities were far less severe in the fifth and sixth centuries than they had been in the fourth, they still took place from time to time, spurring the composition of works such as the *History of Karka d'Beth Slokeh*, an account by an unknown author of the persecution of 446 in Beth Garmai. The martyrdoms of Gregory Pihrangushnasp and Yazdpanah in 542 were also commemorated, and Babai the Great described the martyrdoms of two recent converts from Zoroastrianism, the monk Giwargis Mihramgushnasp and the noblewoman Christina, daughter of the Sasanian governor Yazdin of Nisibis. Babai's account of the martyrdom of Christina has perished apart from its opening, but his moving narrative of the death of Giwargis Mihramgushnasp, crucified in 615 after he was denounced to the Persian authorities by the Jacobites, has survived.

Some of these historians were honest men. Others, sadly, were forgers. The sixth century was a golden age for the falsification of the early history of the Christian Church, both in the Roman and Sasanian Empires. The Church of the East, although separated from the Western Churches, was not immune to their fashions. One such fashion, as the system of patriarchates, metropolitanates and dioceses bedded in, was to fill in the inevitable gaps in the historical record to trace a succession of bishops in individual dioceses right back to the first century, preferably to an apostolic founder. During the sixth century the Persian Church created its own traditions of apostolic foundation by developing the fictitious body of legends that were already growing up around the careers of the founding fathers Addai, Mari and Thomas.

The work of fabrication was pursued by patriarchs, bishops and monks, who alone possessed the historical knowledge to create a plausible setting for their fictions. The patriarch Joseph (552–67), who invented the supposed fourth-century

correspondence between Papa and the Western bishops, was merely the most shameless of the many Nestorian patriarchs who could not resist the temptation to fill in inconvenient gaps in the historical record. In many cases the forgers buttressed their worthless inventions with accounts of local customs and details of topography that are of genuine historical value. A precious reference in the sixth-century *Acts of Mari*, for example, confirms that Nestorian Christians were living in the Gawar plain in Hakkari well before the Arab conquest. Since the nineteenth-century Nestorians told the European missionaries that their ancestors had only moved into the Hakkari region at the end of the fourteenth century, and since this tradition has found its way into nearly all the twentieth-century histories of the Church of the East, this is a fact well worth knowing.

The *Acts of Mari*, a fictitious account of the life of the legendary apostle of Babylonia, was probably written around 560, during Joseph's reign. This audacious hagiography, which was used by the twelfth-century historian Mari as a source for his history of the Nestorian patriarchs, was dreamed up by an anonymous monk of the monastery of Dorqoni in Beth Aramaye. Dorqoni had been founded in the fourth century by Mar 'Abda, but its monks were now claiming that it had been built three centuries earlier by Mari, and that his body had been buried there. Unsurprisingly, the author of the *Acts of Mari* played up Mari's supposed connection with Dorqoni, but he also had other, perhaps nobler motives in concocting his tale. He knew that the Christians of Beth Huzaye and Fars disliked the leadership of the diocese of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and he did his best to promote Mari as a unifying figure who could be accepted by Christian bishops in all provinces of the Sasanian Empire. He did so in three ways. Firstly, he raised Mari's stock by claiming that he had been given a commission to preach the Gospel in Persia by Addai, the prestigious apostle of Roman Edessa. Secondly, he gave Mari the credit for evangelising the whole of Persian Mesopotamia, sending him on a triumphal progress down the Tigris from Nisibis on the Roman border to Prath d'Maishan at the head of the Persian Gulf and artfully placing most of Mari's activity in cities that had been the seat of a Persian bishop at least as early as 410. Finally, having consolidated support for Mari in the Mesopotamian provinces of the Church of the East, he tried to conciliate the Christians of Beth Huzaye and Fars. He could not claim Mari as the founder of Christianity in these two provinces, as their inhabitants would never have accepted such a claim. He therefore accepted their own traditions, that Beth Huzaye had been evangelised by Christian merchants sent from Edessa by Addai and that Fars had been converted by Saint Thomas. But he also, crucially, made Mari visit Beth Huzaye and Fars shortly after these early contacts, where he strengthened the small, beleaguered Christian communities he found there. As far as is known, his conciliatory gesture

was ignored by its intended audience. The *Acts of Mari* may have won over some readers in Beth Huzaye, but the Christians of Fars were in no mood to accept this olive branch. Shortly after the text's publication the metropolitans of Fars cut their ties with the Church of the East for two generations. This intriguing fiction, whose Syriac text has recently been published with a good English translation by Amir Harrak, attests to the very real regional tensions in the Church of the East on the eve of the Arab conquest.

While the monks of the monastery of Dorqoni were constructing this ambitious role for Mari, their counterparts in Adiabene were making almost as exorbitant claims for Addai, the apostle of Roman Edessa. Around 550 an unknown author from Adiabene wrote a Syriac history of the Church of Erbil and its bishops and martyrs. This history, the *Chronicle of Erbil*, took the development of the Addai legend a decisive stage further by transporting him to Persia and claiming him as the apostle of Adiabene. The *Chronicle*, which ignores the identical role claimed by the monks of Dorqoni for Mari, is structured around the careers of twenty bishops of Erbil who sat between the second and sixth centuries, from Paqida, said to have been consecrated by Addai at the beginning of the second century, to Hnana, who became metropolitan of Adiabene in 511. All of the early bishops in this sequence were invented by the author, who bolstered his fiction by assigning improbably precise reign-dates to each of them. The *Chronicle of Erbil*, first edited at the beginning of the twentieth century by Alphonse Mingana, who published the Syriac text of the *Chronicle* with a French translation in 1907, has become a battleground for scholars of the Church of the East, because it has been alleged to be a modern forgery. According to Mingana, the *Chronicle* was the work of Mshiha-zkha, an obscure historian mentioned by 'Abdisho' of Nisibis in his famous list of Nestorian authors, and survived in a single manuscript. It has since been shown beyond reasonable doubt that Mingana doctored his text in order to support this unlikely ascription, and to provide the manuscript with a convincing provenance. Hardly surprisingly, some scholars have suspected that he went further, and also wrote the text itself. Mingana was as brilliant as he was unscrupulous, but it is unlikely that he was capable of deception on so massive a scale. It is far more likely that the text itself is a genuine product of the sixth century, and that Mingana merely forged its provenance in a misguided attempt to win it scholarly acceptance. This appears to be the view of the German scholar Peter Kawerau, who has recently published a new edition of the *Chronicle's* text. Kawerau has stubbornly defended the *Chronicle's* authenticity and historical value, even to the point of impugning the integrity of the 'Roman Catholic theologians' with whom he disagrees, and is very probably right to maintain that the *Chronicle* is an authentic text from the sixth century. But that does not mean that its evidence

can be trusted. The *Chronicle of Erbil* was doubtless written by a monk in one of the Erbil monasteries. Its author was a conscious inventor of tradition, who cheerfully mingled truth with fiction for the greater glory of the diocese of Erbil. Like other historical fictions from this period, the *Chronicle* may conceivably contain information of great value on pagan customs and other aspects of life in Parthian and Sasanian Persia; but it is rarely possible to separate the gold from the dross.

The falsification of the early history of the Church of the East was in some cases pursued with great literary skill. The sixth-century *Acts of Mar Qardagh* are an outstanding example of the forger's artistry. It is not even certain that Mar Qardagh existed, but if he did he was merely one of the many victims of the persecution of Shapur II. This was not good enough for Qardagh's unknown hagiographer. Anticipating the techniques of the modern historical novel, the author of the *Acts* turned Qardagh into a high-ranking Persian nobleman and placed him in an authentic Sasanian court setting. As in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*, artfully-chosen corroborative detail added verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative. Like his real-life counterparts at the court of Khusro II, Qardagh led the hearty life of a country squire. He was fond of riding, shooting, hunting and playing polo, but was also capable of conducting a respectable philosophical conversation on the proofs of the existence of God. Convinced by rational argument of the claims of the Christian faith, and despite the anguish of his Zoroastrian parents, Qardagh converted to Christianity. Unfortunately, Qardagh was not just any old Persian nobleman. With splendid impudence, the author of the *Acts* made him marchwarden (*marzban*) of the western provinces of the Persian Empire, responsible for guarding the border with the Roman Empire. No Christian would ever have been entrusted with so sensitive a military post outside the pages of romance, but it allowed Qardagh's hagiographer to portray him as a loyal, if not terribly competent, servant of the king. Qardagh rather neglected his duties after his conversion, and the Romans were able to mount a raid into Persian territory while the *marzban* was picnicking among the oak trees of Beth Bgash with his new Christian friends. Stung by the reproaches of his subordinates, Qardagh belatedly pursued the raiders, caught them before they made their getaway, and annihilated them. Despite this victory over the enemies of the kingdom, he was later denounced to the king as a Christian by the envious magi. Besieged in his mansion by the king's soldiers, Qardagh gave proof of his skill in archery by killing the chief magus with a bowshot at extreme long range. Eventually, warned in a dream that the hour of his martyrdom was at hand, he surrendered and was brought before the king. Shapur offered him the opportunity to rehabilitate himself by denying his faith, but he refused and was stoned to death. This fine specimen of hagiography, narrated with great art,

is the subject of one of the best recent books on the Church of the East, Joel Walker's *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*.

Practical Enquiry. A far more impressive figure than these wretched forgers was Paul the Persian, who flourished in the reign of the patriarch Ezekiel (570–81) and wrote a treatise on Aristotle's logic which he dedicated to the Persian king Khusro I Anushirwan. If he expected the king to read it, he must have either have composed this treatise in Persian or translated it into Persian from a Syriac original. According to tradition, Paul abandoned Christianity and become a Zoroastrian after failing in his quest to be appointed metropolitan of Fars. This apostasy may well have been a later invention, as Paul took a notoriously dim view of faith. A champion of rational enquiry, he famously declared: 'Knowledge deals with what is in front of us, with what can be seen and known, faith with all those recondite vagaries which are invisible and can never be known for sure. Faith deals in doubt, knowledge in certainties. Doubts sow dissension: exact knowledge breeds consensus. Knowledge is therefore superior to faith, and should be given greater honour.' For these words alone, Paul deserves to be recognised as the patron saint of modern science. He would have been disgusted at the lies peddled by his Christian contemporaries in the service of faith.

Paul the Persian was not the only Nestorian writer of this period to concern himself with useful and practical subjects of enquiry. His contemporary Joseph of Beth Huzaye, a grammarian who taught at the School of Nisibis shortly before Hnana's turbulent presidency, invented a striking corporate image for the Church of the East by introducing a graceful system of dots above and below the text to indicate vowel pronunciation. Nisibis had a significant Jewish population, and it has been conjectured that Joseph's innovation may have helped to inspire the punctuation marks later used in the Hebrew Masoretic texts. In the late seventh century the Jacobite scholar Jacob of Edessa, whose admiration for the Greeks made him intensely unpopular in his Syriac-speaking milieu, replaced Joseph's dots with tiny letters representing the Greek vowel sounds. Jacob seems to have been motivated more by aesthetic and practical considerations than by a conscious desire to distance Jacobite from Nestorian practice, but the poor relations between the two Churches ensured that his innovation was not followed by the Nestorians. Nestorian scribes have continued to use Joseph's system of dots to this day, and not just from chauvinist motives. Although the Nestorian symbols are not quite as intuitive as the Greek letters with which Jacob of Edessa replaced them, they are considerably more elegant. With a little practice, Nestorian texts can be read just as fluently as their Jacobite and Maronite counterparts, and are far prettier to look at.

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Exegesis and Devotional Literature. Many Nestorian writers eschewed controversial subjects, and occupied their time blamelessly with the exposition of the Scriptures, the explanation of the liturgy and the composition of devotional literature. The patriarch Aba I, who became fluent in Greek during his residence in Constantinople, translated a Greek version of the Bible into Syriac. His translation failed to catch on, but he wrote commentaries on several books of the Bible, and was also esteemed as a composer of hymns. His disciple Qiyore (Cyrus) of Edessa, a graduate of the School of Nisibis who opened a similar school, albeit on a smaller scale, in the Lakhmid capital Hirta, wrote an aetiology of Nestorian liturgical practices. This work, *The Causes of the Feasts*, has been edited and translated into English by William Macomber. Liturgical commentaries tended to attract writers of an antiquarian cast of mind, and it must be admitted that some of the Nestorian essays in this genre do not make exciting reading. It should be remembered, however, that they were written with a serious theological purpose. According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose opinions were revered by the Nestorians, the sacraments and the liturgy were symbols that could not exert their full salvific value on the faithful unless their significance was properly explained. Devotional literature was a genre dominated by monastic writers, particularly in the second half of the sixth century, when a number of monastic schools were built along the model of the smaller theological schools that had sprung up in imitation of the School of Nisibis. One of the most important texts of the period was the *Book of Gifts*, written by the metropolitan Shubhalmaran of Beth Garmai, a monk before he became a bishop and a prominent member of the Nestorian delegation that debated with the Jacobites at the court of Khusro II in 612. The *Book of Gifts*, edited with an English translation by David Lane, won a readership well beyond its Nestorian milieu, and parts of this work have recently been discovered among new Syriac finds in the Sinai monastery of Saint Catherine.

Polemical Literature. The outstanding Nestorian writer of the generation writing around the time of the Arab conquest was undoubtedly Babai the Great, the superior of the monastery of Mar Abraham on Mount Izla, whose historical works have already been mentioned. ‘Abdisho’ of Nisibis has recorded part of his large output, and a number of other works are enumerated in the *Chronicle of Seert*. His most influential work was the *Book of the Union*, a controversial treatise which set out the strict dyophysite position on the union of humanity and divinity in Christ. Indulging his taste for polemic, Babai also wrote several other works of controversy, now lost, against the Jacobites and the Messallians. Important at the time, these works lost their appeal once the threat from these heretics receded after the Arab conquest. He also wrote two commentaries, one on the Bible and

the other on the *Centuries* of Evagrius, both of which were highly thought of. He also wrote a number of philosophical and liturgical works, and several hymns. The loss of most of Babai's controversial works is scarcely to be regretted, but some scholars mourn the disappearance of one splendidly-titled treatise, *Against Those Who Argue that the Body will be Resurrected in the Shape of a Sphere*.

The sixth and early seventh centuries were an age of bitter polemic, and several Nestorian authors besides Mar Babai excelled in this genre. Abraham of Beth Rabban, a nephew of Narsai who succeeded Elisha^c bar Quzbye as director of the School of Nisibis around 550, wrote several inflammatory tracts against the Zoroastrians and the Jews, the traditional enemies of the Church of the East, and others against the growing threat posed by the Jacobites. In his quieter moments, he found time to write a book that addressed problematical passages in the Old and New Testaments. Gabriel of Qatar, a teacher at the School of Seleucia-Ctesiphon who was writing during the 620s, when the patriarchate was vacant and the Nestorians were hard pressed by the Jacobites, wrote a lost work on the union of the natures in Christ, mentioned by 'Abdisho^c of Nisibis, which sounds as though it drew heavily on Babai's *Book of the Union*. Gabriel was one of several important writers produced by the Nestorian communities of the Persian Gulf during the seventh century; and it is curious that he and his successors—Dadisho^c of Qatar and Isaac of Nineveh—flourished at a time when these Christian colonies in northern Arabia were rapidly crumbling before the advance of Islam.

Chapter 3
CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS
(634–779)

OVERVIEW

During the seventh century the Arab conquest brought over half of the world's Christians under Muslim rule. The patriarchates of Jerusalem and Alexandria were entirely overrun by the Arabs before the end of the century. The Phoenician, Syrian, Mesopotamian and Cilician provinces of the patriarchate of Antioch also fell into the hands of the Arabs together with Antioch itself, leaving only the province of Isauria, protected by the Taurus mountains, and Cyprus still under Christian rule. The conquest of north Africa also engulfed a large number of dioceses in the patriarchate of Rome. Although the patriarchate of Constantinople escaped relatively lightly in comparison with the other three eastern patriarchates, it nevertheless lost many of the dioceses in its two Armenian provinces.

Because the tide of Arab expansion was eventually stemmed before it could reach the heartland of Europe, modern Europeans often forget the scale of this disaster for Christianity in the lands which gave it birth. Even at the most conservative estimate, without taking into account the losses of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, the Arab conquest of Egypt placed under Muslim rule the nine metropolitan provinces of the patriarchate of Alexandria, and the conquest of Mesopotamia added a further three metropolitan provinces in the patriarchate of Jerusalem and twelve metropolitan provinces in the patriarchate of Antioch. Over 300 Christian dioceses passed under Muslim rule. While most of the Christians of these areas were Chalcedonians, the Arab conquest of Syria, Iraq and Persia also brought under Muslim rule the vast majority of Nestorian and Jacobite Christians. At the time of the Arab conquest the Jacobite Church seems to have had around 80 dioceses under its patriarch at Antioch, and perhaps a dozen dioceses in Iraq and Persia under the 'grand metropolitan' at Tagrit. The Church of the East had ten metropolitan provinces, covering Iraq, Iran and northern Arabia, and between 60 and 70 dioceses.

Some Christians reacted to the Arab conquest by fleeing from their homes and going into exile elsewhere in Christendom. Others converted to Islam, but

their numbers were probably not large, except in Arabia itself. The conquerors were relatively few in number, kept themselves to themselves in military camps, and at first actively discouraged conversion by Jews and Christians because they were more interested in taxing them. Jews and Christians were required to pay a poll tax (*jizyah*) which was substantially heavier than the charitable contributions (*zakat*) levied on Muslims. Conversion to Islam therefore offered both social and financial advantage, and this seems to have been the primary motivation for defections from Christianity. Most Christians, however, neither fled nor converted. They remained where they were, continued to hold the Christian faith, paid the oppressive poll tax and adapted to life under the Muslims. Because they were 'people of the book', whose prophet Jesus had been a forerunner of Muhammad, they were treated by the conquerors as a 'protected community' (*dhimmi*). For the Nestorians, this condition was in many respects akin to their tolerated status under the Sasanians. The caliphs, like the Persian kings before them, dealt directly with the Nestorian patriarchs, and most internal affairs were dealt with by the Christians' own representatives. Christians were forbidden to preach their faith to Muslims, just as they had been forbidden to preach to Zoroastrians; and apostasy from Islam to Christianity was in theory punishable by death, just as apostasy from Zoroastrianism had been.

Over time, Muslim discrimination first slowed, then halted, then reversed the growth that the Nestorians and their Jacobite rivals had experienced under the Sasanians. The process of decline was slow and undramatic, and continues to this day. The Christian population of the caliphate began to fall, partly through conversions to Islam and partly through emigration. The decline could not be stopped, because there were few new Christian recruits in the lands of Islam. Conversions to Christianity, frequent enough during the Sasanian period when its main competition came from fire-worshipping Zoroastrians and idolatrous pagans, dried up after the Arab conquest. In the contest for hearts, minds and souls, the Muslims were far more redoubtable opponents than the Zoroastrians. Some new Nestorian dioceses were created during the Umayyad period, because the Muslims were at first so thin on the ground that the eclipse of the Zoroastrians gave the Church of the East a brief window of opportunity; but the number of Nestorian Christians living in the caliphate probably peaked at the end of the Umayyad period and thereafter began to fall. Significantly, some of the new dioceses were established not to serve a growing Christian population but to confront the threat of defection by weak-minded Nestorians to the Jacobites.

During their 'window of opportunity', while the Arabs were struggling to impose their rule on the former territories of the Sasanian Empire, the Nestorians of northern Iraq continued to build new monasteries in the hills

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of the modern 'Amadiya and 'Aqra districts. They also took advantage of the breakdown of law and order to escalate their feud with the Jacobites. There were several violent clashes between Nestorian and Jacobite monks during the unsettled 630s, which were glorified in *The History of Rabban Hormizd the Persian*, a contemporary paean to religious intolerance. Much of the surviving Nestorian literature from the Umayyad period is polemical in tone, particularly the many monastic histories which were written at this time, though there were also calmer voices. One of the most respected authors of the Church of the East, Isaac of Nineveh, wrote his devotional works during the first decades of Arab rule.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Arab Conquest. The Roman victory over Persia in 628, after a generation of warfare, was so stunning that many Romans could be forgiven for believing that it had ushered in a new world order, a golden age of peace and justice among nations. Peace did not last long, however. Only six years later, both Rome and Persia were embroiled with a new and improbable enemy—the Muslim Arabs. In 634, two years after the death of Muhammad, Arab armies under the command of his successor Abu Bakr burst out of the confines of the Arabian peninsula to begin an astonishing career of conquest. The long duel between Christian Rome and Zoroastrian Persia had weakened both the victors and the vanquished, and the armies of Islam, coming fresh to the fray, inflicted a series of shattering defeats on both empires simultaneously. As an Arab writer neatly put it, they 'chastened Khusro (*kasaru Kisra*) and curbed Caesar (*qasaru Qaysar*)'. The eastern Roman Empire was strong enough to survive, though with the permanent loss of its territories in Syria, Palestine and north Africa, but the Sasanian Empire collapsed completely in the face of the Arab onslaught.

In 635 and 636 the Arabs invaded and overran Palestine and Syria. A Roman army of 80,000 men was annihilated south of Damascus on the Yarmuk river, surprised by the Arabs in a blinding sandstorm. Jerusalem, the spiritual centre of Christendom, surrendered to the Muslims shortly afterwards. At the same time Arab armies were advancing into Egypt. By 641, when Heraclius died, humiliated by the loss of Jerusalem to this new enemy so soon after it had been won back from the Persians, Alexandria had also fallen. Five years later Egypt, the richest province of the Roman Empire, was firmly under Arab control. Arab armies were by then also striking deep into Persia.

Roman Syria and Roman-occupied Mesopotamia, including the Nestorian country around the Tigris, were overrun by the Arabs in 639 and 640. The

Roman defences along the Tigris frontier faced east, against the immemorial threat from Persia, but their victory on the Yarmuk enabled the Arabs to take this formidable fortress system in reverse. Instead of confronting the Roman defences by advancing northwest up the Tigris the Arabs attacked them from the opposite direction. From the Yarmuk an Arab army advanced on Damascus, which fell after a brief siege. Its fall enabled the Arabs to swing round behind the forts of the Tur ʿAbdin and roll up the cities of Roman Syria from the west. Edessa was the first city to open its gates, and its example was quickly followed by all the major Roman towns between the Tur ʿAbdin and the Euphrates. The Arabs next surrounded and sealed off the Tur ʿAbdin plateau by taking Maiperqat to its north and Persian Nisibis to its south. Cut off from any hope of relief, the forts on the plateau eventually either surrendered, like Mardin, or were stormed and ‘opened’, like Dara. After resistance had come to an end in Roman Syria the Arab forces regrouped, crossed the old frontier into Beth Zabdai, and advanced southeast down the Tigris to capture Mosul.

While northern Mesopotamia was being conquered from the west, the fortunes of the Sasanians had also collapsed in the south. The Persian armies were routed at Qadisiya in 636, and Seleucia-Ctesiphon was occupied by the invaders shortly afterwards. The Arabs paused for a year or two to consolidate their conquest of Mesopotamia, and then advanced onto the Iranian plateau with an army swelled by Persian deserters to confront the main Persian army. The two sides met in decisive battle at Nihawand in 642, and the Sasanians were defeated. The last Sasanian king, Yazdgird III, was killed in 651 after the remnants of the Sasanian forces were overwhelmed at Merv. The Sasanian territories now became part of an Arab Empire, or caliphate (so called because it was ruled by the *khaliḥ*, or successors, of Muhammad), which by the eighth century extended from the shores of the Mediterranean and Red Seas to the Oxus and the Indus, and from the Indian Ocean to the Caucasus and the Caspian.

At Mosul, Tagrit and elsewhere in northern Mesopotamia, the Arabs were cautiously welcomed by the Christian population. Since 629 this area had been under Roman occupation, and the occupiers had made themselves deeply unpopular, persecuting both Nestorians and Jacobites in an attempt to impose Chalcedonian doctrine. The Arabs also claimed kinship with the Syrian Christians. At the siege of Tagrit, the Arab commander won over the city’s Christians with the appeal: ‘You are ours! What have you in common with the Greeks?’ The Christian population of southern Mesopotamia, still under Sasanian rule, did not have so clear a choice. Sasanian rule was far less oppressive than Roman rule, and many Christians in the south no doubt felt a strong loyalty to the Sasanian state. But there were other considerations. They would remain in a subordinate position whether

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Zoroastrianism or Islam won, and the new religion preached by the Muslims, strongly influenced by Jewish and Christian thought, may have seemed to many preferable to the idolatry of the magi. Although, therefore, there is no record of active help being given to the Arabs in the south, much of its Christian population may not have altogether regretted an Arab victory. Although the conquest itself was a terrifying experience, as the Arab troops ravaged, burned, plundered and killed as enthusiastically as their Roman and Persian counterparts, the Christians soon settled down peacefully under Muslim rule. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, there was chaos for five years, 'with continual upsets and alarms', but after that normality quickly returned.

Muslim Attitudes towards Christians. Under the Sasanians the main threat to Persia's Christians had come from the state religion of Zoroastrianism. With the Arab conquest this threat rapidly diminished. Persia's Arab conquerors treated Zoroastrians with great harshness, partly because, as the dominant religion in Persia, Zoroastrianism represented a challenge to Islam which could not be ignored, and partly because they were repelled by its beliefs and practices which, unlike those of Judaism and Christianity, were entirely alien to the spirit of Islam. The Zoroastrian clergy was brutally repressed by the Arabs. Thousands of magi and priests were killed, and thousands of others fled from Persia to northwest India to escape a similar fate. Their descendants, nicknamed Parsees ('Persians') by the Indians, have stubbornly maintained their beliefs to this day, and still expose the bodies of their dead in the traditional Zoroastrian manner in Gujarat's 'towers of silence'. This persecution broke the power of the Zoroastrian religion in Persia, and within a few decades of the Arab conquest Zoroastrians probably accounted for a smaller proportion of Persia's population than Christians. Those who persisted in their belief lost the dominant status they had enjoyed under the Sasanians. Illogically but conveniently, they were sometimes classed with Jews and Christians as protected 'people of the book', and like the Jews and Christians were subjected to a range of official and unofficial restrictions and humiliations indicative of their inferior social status.

While the Muslims looked down on the Zoroastrians and frankly despised pagans, their attitudes towards Jews and Christians in the conquered territories were rather more complex. Unlike Zoroastrianism and other pagan religions, the teachings of Judaism and Christianity were regarded as successive revelations from God, each valid in its time but each in turn corrupted and eventually superseded by a more valuable revelation. Judaism was regarded as foreshadowing Christianity, and Christianity as prefiguring the final, authentic revelation entrusted to the prophet Muhammad. Muslim writers therefore used the same word, *islam*

(‘submission’), to describe pre-Islamic conversions to Christianity as they used for the act of becoming a Muslim. Although superseded by Islam, these earlier revelations deserved respect as the fullest expression of God’s will available at the time they were made, and Jews and Christians enjoyed in Muslim eyes a special status as *ahl al-kitab*, ‘people of the book’. Just as Christians continued to hold the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament in respect, while insisting that God’s relationship with mankind had been transformed by the life, death and resurrection of Christ, Muslims did not deny the value of the earlier revelations of God’s will, but also insisted that Christian teachings had been superseded by the message given to Muhammad.

This view of progressive, chronological revelation required Muslims, like Christians before them, to define their attitude towards those who refused to accept the validity of the new revelation. In the Qur’an and in the *hadiths*, the earliest written traditions surrounding Muhammad, their ranks included pagans and ‘hypocrites’, apparently backsliding Muslims. They also included Jews and ‘Nazarenes’ (*al-Nasara*), the term previously used in the Sasanian Empire for Christians and now taken over by the Arabs. The inclusion of Jews and Christians is not surprising. According to the revelation entrusted to Muhammad, God was a unity and not, as the Christians held, a trinity. He had no sons, and Jesus, though a great prophet, as Moses had been before him, was only a man, not the son of God. Muhammad, the ‘messenger of God’, was the last and greatest of the prophets, and his revelation took precedence over the teachings of Moses and Jesus. For all the common moral and ethical ground between the three religions, and for all Islam’s historical debt to its predecessors, these uncompromising propositions placed the new religion in irreconcilable conflict with Judaism and Christianity. No thoughtful Jew or Christian could possibly accept the claims of Muhammad without abandoning his own faith.

Although most Muslim rulers accepted their responsibility to ‘protect’ docile Christian taxpayers, they saw no reason to hide their disapproval of Christianity as a faith. The Christians had fallen into grievous error by refusing to listen to the message of Muhammad. They were obstinate and misguided, and needed to be reminded of their inferior status. They were therefore subjected to a battery of repressive measures designed to harass and humiliate them. They were required to wear a distinctive belt and turban, to proclaim their inferior faith. They were allowed to keep existing churches in good repair, but not to build new ones. They were forbidden to disturb good Muslims with the clanging of church bells, the singing of hymns or the sound of prayer, and were not allowed to try to convert Muslims to Christianity. They were forbidden to carry weapons, or ride horses. Mixed marriages were possible, but the rules on inheritance of property were

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weighted in favour of the Muslim partner. The testimony of a Christian in a lawcourt was worth less than that of a Muslim. These spiteful measures were often not enforced, or could often be evaded by bribery, but their mere existence was dispiriting. They sprang from the conviction that Islam was right and Christianity was wrong. The Muslims, of course, were not the first to practise this kind of religious discrimination. Similar measures, based on a comparable conviction, were applied to the Jews in the lands where the Christians ruled. Some Muslim scholars, understandably, have not been slow to draw attention to the deplorable policies pursued by Christian emperors and kings towards the Jews. But two wrongs do not make a right.

The Church of the East, of course, had long been a 'tolerated' community under the Sasanian kings, and in some respects the relationship between the captive Christian Churches and their new Muslim masters resembled the arrangements that had already been developed in Sasanian Persia. But there were also important differences between the Zoroastrians and the Muslims. The Zoroastrians had occasionally persecuted high-profile converts to Christianity under the later Sasanian kings, but ordinary Christians were generally allowed to live their lives without official harassment. This live-and-let-live policy had allowed the Church of the East to expand rapidly in the fifth and sixth centuries. On the eve of the Arab conquest the Christian population of the Sasanian Empire was larger than it had ever been. Christians were certainly a majority of the population in northern Iraq, and the number of Nestorian and Jacobite dioceses in many parts of the empire was gradually rising. Had the Persians been able to beat off the Arab invaders, either Jacobite or Nestorian Christianity might well have become the state religion of the Sasanian Empire within a century or two. All this changed with the Arab conquest. The honour of Islam required Muslims to exert constant pressure upon the misguided 'people of the book', and ultimately this insidious and unrelenting attrition did more to weaken Christianity than the violent but sporadic persecutions of the Zoroastrians.

In the long term, the Arab conquest doomed all the Christian Churches of the caliphate to systemic decline. But it also had one very important short-term advantage for the Nestorians. It saved the Church of the East from the consequences of its disastrous folly in alienating Khusro II in 605. Although the Nestorian church was probably still the largest Christian Church in the Sasanian Empire, the Jacobites had made up a lot of ground during the two decades (609–28) in which the Church of the East was without a patriarch. This potentially threatening state of affairs was transformed by the Arab invasions. The Arabs decided to hold one Christian leader responsible for the behaviour of all the Christians of the caliphate. They might reasonably have chosen a Chalcedonian

patriarch, as there were far more Chalcedonians than Nestorians in the conquered territories, but they chose the Nestorian catholicus instead. This was a deliberate and politic choice. The Nestorians and Jacobites now called the Chalcedonians 'Melkites', 'king's men', a name indicative of their theoretical loyalty to the Roman emperor, and this name damned them in the eyes of the Arabs. So long as the three Chalcedonian patriarchates under Arab rule remained doctrinally linked to the unsubdued patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople, the acquiescence of their congregations to the new order could not be entirely taken for granted, and it was therefore preferable to keep them relatively weak. The Nestorian Church, despised by the Chalcedonians as heretical, was not likely to intrigue with their leaders either outside or inside the caliphate. If the Arabs also considered the claims of the Jacobite Church, which was regarded with equal loathing by the Chalcedonians, the Nestorian patriarch had certain advantages over his Jacobite counterpart. He was the head of a Church which had a far longer record of official minority status, and its theology was marginally less offensive than that of the Jacobites to Muslims. Indeed, a legend would eventually develop that Muhammad's thinking had been influenced by conversations at Bostra with Sargis Bahira, a Nestorian monk. This legend was believed not only by many Christians, but by some Muslims too.

Although Muslim discrimination against Christians impinged to a greater or lesser degree upon all Christians living in the caliphate, contacts between Christians and Muslims during the Umayyad period were relatively infrequent. Indeed, many of the Christians who lived in the rural districts of northern Iraq probably never saw a Muslim in their life, unless business affairs happened to take them to Mosul or Nisibis. This was because the administration of the Christians, including the collection of taxes, was in the hands of village headmen (*dihqans*) and country squires (*shaharija*), and these local magnates were themselves Christians. This system went back to Sasanian times, and persisted into the 'Abbasid period. Later Arab writers claimed that these local officials gave themselves great consequence, tracing their lineages back to the noble families of the third century who had helped Ardashir I win the throne of Persia. They dressed in Persian style, and like good Persian gentlemen played chess and polo. The Christian martyr Mar Qardagh, in the form in which he was re-imagined in the fictitious sixth-century history of his life, was a typical *shahrij*. Thomas of Marga disapproved of these local gentry. They were Christians in name only, he alleged, and said that Christ was a mere man. These polo-playing exquisites were not members of an obscure ultra-Nestorian Christian sect, as has been fancifully suggested. Rather, their rank and consequence brought them frequently into social contact with Muslim officials, so they curried favour by downplaying their Christianity. No doubt they were

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orthodox Jacobites or Nestorians, and attended church regularly on their rural estates; but in the presence of influential Muslims, who had the power to advance their careers, they referred to Christ as 'Jesus, son of Mary', as the Muslims did. Christians were doing the same thing elsewhere in the Umayyad realms, notably in Palestine; not exactly denying their faith, but rather choosing not to make an issue of it in everyday life. Thomas of Marga's condemnation of the *shaharija* reflected the distaste felt by downtrodden Christian taxpayers towards a group of wealthy collaborators who trimmed their beliefs in Muslim company.

Such temptations were bound to occur, as there were some very attractive jobs available for educated Christians under the Umayyad caliphs. The Nestorian medical school of Jundishapur had long been admired, and this school continued to produce high-calibre graduates after the Arab conquest, whose skills were much in demand. Like the Persian kings before them, the Umayyad caliphs surrounded themselves with Christian doctors, because they knew that they were far better than their Muslim counterparts. These Christian doctors, trading on their irreplaceable expertise, enjoyed much the same influence at the court of the caliphs as they had done at the Sasanian court. Christians also served as administrators, sometimes rising to high rank, and as teachers, scribes and accountants. They were also respected for their high level of general culture. During the Umayyad period the limited Islamic education available to an Arab Muslim could not compare with the breadth of a Christian education. A well-educated Nestorian monk might not know any Latin, but he would be familiar with the riches of the Christian literary tradition, may have had a limited knowledge of the Greek classics, and would also have read a number of Greek medical and philosophical works, although in most cases only in Syriac translation. The uncompromising caliph 'Abd al-Malik (685–705), who built the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem to trumpet the dominance of Islam over Judaism and Christianity, also wanted to be thought of as a cultured ruler, and invited the Christian poet Akhtal to his court.

The Seventh-Century Nestorian Patriarchs. The patriarch Isho'yahb II (628–45), who had met the victorious Roman emperor Heraclius in Aleppo in 630, before the extent of the Arab threat became clear, struggled to come to terms with the rapid march of events. As the Sasanians fought to contain the Arab breakthrough, Isho'yahb opened negotiations with the Muslims. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, the governor of the Arabian city of Najran, accompanied by the city's Nestorian bishop Isho', approached the Muslim leaders. Muhammad had just died, and the Nestorian bishop instead met his lieutenant Abu Bakr, who listened sympathetically to what he had to say. Isho'yahb was later granted an interview with Abu Bakr's successor, the caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–44), who gave

the patriarch a charter of protection for the Christians. It is not clear whether this 'Covenant of 'Umar', which was invoked by successive Nestorian patriarchs whenever Muslim rule became more than usually oppressive, was a genuine charter between the Muslims or Christians or (as seems more likely) a later Christian invention. For what it is worth, the 'Covenant' stipulated that the Christians should be protected from the attacks of their enemies; that they should not be forced to accompany the Arabs to war; that they should be permitted to repair their old churches; that they should be taxed at specified, modest rates; and that Muslim masters should not force Christian maidservants to change their faith or prevent them from fasting and praying. Word of Isho'yahb's approach to the Muslims reached the ears of the Persian king Yazdgird III, who bitterly reproached the patriarch. Isho'yahb defended his conduct, protesting his loyalty to the Sasanian dynasty and arguing that he was only trying to mitigate the sufferings of Christians in Arab-occupied territories. His excuses were reluctantly accepted. Isho'yahb died in the town of Karka d'Gedan in Beth Garmai in 645, several years before the final collapse of the Sasanian Empire, while travelling to Nisibis to settle a dispute between the city's Nestorian Christians and their metropolitan. In the same year, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, for centuries the seat of the patriarchs of the Church of the East, fell to the Arabs.

Isho'yahb II was succeeded by the elderly patriarch Maremmeh (645–8). Like most of the Nestorian patriarchs, Maremmeh had been a monk before he became a bishop. He had spent much of his life in the monastery of Mar Abraham of Kashkar, and was already elderly when he was plucked from obscurity by Isho'yahb II and consecrated bishop of Nineveh. He was appointed metropolitan of Elam shortly before Isho'yahb's death. His administration of his province was widely admired, and this was probably the main reason he was chosen to succeed Isho'yahb; though it was also rumoured that he owed his elevation to the favour of the Muslim leaders, because he had used his position as bishop of Nineveh to supply food to the Arab armies besieging Mosul. During Maremmeh's brief patriarchate the Church of the East did its best to pretend that the Muslims did not exist. The most significant event of Maremmeh's reign was the condemnation of the moderate bishop Sahdona of Mahoze d'Arewan, who was still arguing that there was no essential difference between the Nestorians and the Chalcedonians. The metropolitan Isho'yahb of Adiabene, who had written a stream of letters to Sahdona to try to get him to see reason, eventually denounced him to the patriarch as a heretic. Sahdona was excommunicated and took refuge in the Roman Empire. Shortly afterwards his supporters procured his recall and he was restored to his diocese, only to be deposed again by Isho'yahb, who succeeded Maremmeh as patriarch in 649 and pursued his old enemy inexorably. Once again Sahdona went

into exile. This time he was not recalled, but spent the last years of his life as a solitary in a monastery near Edessa. Distrusted by Chalcedonians and Nestorians alike, he had paid the classic penalty of the peacemaker.

The ten-year reign of Isho'yahb III of Adiabene (649–59), who had burnished his credentials as a zealous defender of the Nestorian faith by his successful persecution of Sahdona, saw the final collapse of the Sasanian Empire. Indeed, Isho'yahb helped to recover the body of the last Sasanian king Yazdgird III for burial after his ignominious death near Merv in 651. In the midst of these stirring events, the Nestorian patriarch applied much of his energies to keeping the Severans at bay. The Jacobites of Mosul, supported by the Church leadership in Tagrit, applied to the new Muslim authorities for permission to build a church in Mosul, and Isho'yahb bribed right and left to forestall this unwelcome development. The Arab governors of Iraq were no less corrupt than their Persian predecessors had been, and for the time being Mosul remained a Nestorian stronghold. The Jacobites were also active at Nisibis, and Isho'yahb urged the city's Nestorian metropolitan Isaac to pull down a church that they were trying to build there. Isho'yahb was not always so combative. He was a noted author, and made a permanent mark on the ritual of the Church of the East by overhauling its liturgy. He revised the Nestorian *hudra* or service book, and wrote offices for baptism, absolution and consecration that are still admired today. He made sure that this service book was used in every church, so that it became the standard version. He also showed notable favour to the monastery of Beth 'Abe. He built a magnificent church for the monastery, and also presented it with a precious reliquary which he had lifted from a church in Antioch while serving as a member of the embassy to Heraclius in 630. He would have endowed the monastery with a school as well, but the monks of Beth 'Abe refused to run it, so he built it in his native village of Kuphlana instead. Finally, he seems to have anticipated the modern technique of effective time management. 'Every week,' says Mari, 'he would ask himself what he needed to do, and how he might usefully advance the affairs of the Christians.'

Isho'yahb's ten-year reign was embittered by a lingering dispute with the metropolitan Shem'on of Fars, who refused to accept the authority of the patriarchs of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Around a hundred of the letters Isho'yahb wrote as patriarch have survived, and many of them are devoted to this unedifying schism. According to the canon law of the Church of the East at this period, the patriarch had the right to confirm or 'perfect' every metropolitan and bishop after his consecration. For several years Shem'on and his suffragan bishops in Fars and northern Arabia had been dispensing with this important courtesy. Shortly after his accession Isho'yahb wrote to Shem'on to complain that two metropolitans

(presumably Shemʿon and his immediate predecessor) and more than twenty bishops in Fars and Beth Qatrāye had failed to seek patriarchal confirmation of their appointments. This relatively straightforward dispute was complicated by the Arab conquest, when events moved so fast that they spiralled out of the control of both protagonists. The Christian Churches of northern Arabia came under Muslim rule several years before the Arabs drove the Sasanians from Fars itself, and during this hiatus, in the late 640s, the bishops of Beth Qatrāye threw off their allegiance to the metropolitan Shemʿon of Fars and pledged their allegiance to the new Muslim authorities. They even made Muslim professions of faith, according to Ishoʿyahb, perhaps under the impression that the new monotheistic religion was identical to Christianity in all important respects. Faced with this episcopal rebellion on two levels, Ishoʿyahb sent two bishops from the neighbouring province of Beth Huzāye on a visitation to Fars, probably to assess whether the bishops of Fars were fully behind their metropolitan, and also showed his teeth by convening a synod which condemned the apostate bishops of Beth Qatrāye. Realising that nothing more could be expected from these renegades, Ishoʿyahb did his best to provide for their flock. He released the monks of Beth Qatrāye from their customary vows of obedience to their bishops, and appealed for their help to shore up the Christian faith in northern Arabia.

Help was needed urgently, as some of the Christians of Beth Qatrāye, perhaps influenced by the lead of their bishops, were putting up very little resistance to Muslim blandishments. In one of his most famous letters to Shemʿon of Fars, Ishoʿyahb complained about the alarmingly high number of Christians in Oman (Beth Mazunāye) who had converted to Islam during the first years of the Arab conquest. According to the patriarch, the Arabs had not threatened the Christians in any way. 'As for the Arabs, to whom God has at this time given rule over the world, you know well how they act towards us. Not only do they not oppose Christianity, but they even praise our faith, honour the priests and saints of our Lord, and give aid to the churches and monasteries.' Clearly, he pointed out, the Arabs had wanted money, not conversions. But yet the Christians of Oman had chosen to become Muslims instead of paying the poll tax. 'To keep half of their wealth for a few short years they forsook their faith, which would have lasted them for ever.'

Although Ishoʿyahb could not explain why the Nestorians of Oman had been so ready to convert to Islam, he had to admit that there was something dangerously seductive about the new religion. Many thoughtful Christian scholars agreed with him. Not only were the Muslims preaching the worship of one God, in terms which clearly showed Jewish and Christian influence, but they were doing so in plain, simple language which the common people could understand. To

Christians sceptical of miracles or repelled by the unending, unedifying debate over the nature of Christ, the Muslim faith offered an attractive alternative. Muhammad, the Messenger of God and lawgiver of Islam, was a prophet; but he was not the son of God. He was a remarkable leader; but he was no miracle-worker. He preached one God, not a complex trinity whose nature baffled the understanding of the best minds in Christendom. While Muslims were asked to revere the prophet Muhammad, who had been entrusted with the final, culminating revelation of God's plan for mankind, they were not expected to worship him. Islam was, in the eyes of many Christians, a rational faith, and one that did not strain the credulity of its adherents.

Isho'yahb III died in 659 and recommended his successor Giwargis I (660–80) on his deathbed. Giwargis, who was metropolitan of Adiabene at the time, was an old friend and protégé of Isho'yahb, but his reign got off to an unfortunate start. Another Giwargis, metropolitan of Nisibis, who had also owed his rise to Isho'yahb's favour, was absent in Fars when Isho'yahb died, and on his return allowed himself to be persuaded that the late patriarch had intended him, not his namesake, to succeed him. By this time Giwargis of Adiabene had already been enthroned, but Giwargis of Nisibis refused to accept the inevitable. He conspicuously ignored the new patriarch, and openly snubbed him when he attended a church service in Nisibis to seek a reconciliation. This disrespectful behaviour was too much for his congregation, and they forced their metropolitan to make his submission to the new patriarch. The patriarch had so far shown exemplary forbearance, but the repentant metropolitan now found him in a less forgiving mood. He was told that he had already been promoted beyond his abilities, and could count himself lucky to keep his present job. After bringing Giwargis of Nisibis to heel the patriarch was reconciled with another jealous metropolitan, Giwargis of Maishan, through the good offices of Khudahwi, the superior of the monastery of Beth Hale. He then held a synod at Dairin in northern Arabia, whose acts have survived, to try to resolve the continuing dispute between the bishops of the northern Arabian dioceses and the metropolitan Shem'on of Fars. He died in 680 in Hirta, and was buried in the same church as the illustrious sixth-century patriarch Aba I.

Giwargis I was succeeded by the elderly and infirm metropolitan Yohannan bar Marta of Elam, the scion of a wealthy Christian family of Hormizd Ardashir. Yohannan I (681–3), the first of eight patriarchs to bear that name, died of illness after an undistinguished reign of only two years. He was succeeded in 686 by Hnanisho' I (686–98), whose literary accomplishments later won him the title Hnanisho' the Great. His reign was turbulent and unhappy. The metropolitan Yohannan of Nisibis, surnamed Garba ('the Leper'), one of the unsuccessful

candidates in the election of 686, vigorously attempted to reverse its inconvenient result. Between 691 and 693 the Church of the East was racked by a schism almost on the scale of that of Narsai and Elisha^c a century and a half earlier. In 691, after several years spent advancing his own cause by persuasion and bribery at the court of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705), Yohannan was able to secure the deposition of Hnanisho^c and his own appointment as patriarch. His task was eased by the fact that Hnanisho^c had deeply offended the caliph by insulting Islam. In the early days of his patriarchate ‘Abd al-Malik had asked Hnanisho^c what he thought of the religion of the Arabs. Unwisely, Hnanisho^c replied that he did not think much of it. Islam, unlike Judaism and Christianity, had been founded by the sword, and was unsupported by the evidence of miracles. The caliph was only with difficulty dissuaded from tearing the patriarch’s tongue out, and ordered that Hnanisho^c was never again to be admitted into his presence. Now, on ‘Abd al-Malik’s orders, the governor Bashr of Kufa summoned Hnanisho^c, stripped him of his patriarchal robe and staff of office, handed them to Yohannan and dismissed the deposed patriarch amid the jeers and laughter of his courtiers. Shortly afterwards, by the caliph’s order, Yohannan was consecrated patriarch in his place. As Hnanisho^c refused to accept his deposition, Yohannan arrested him and threw him in prison. After the fuss had died down, he decided to dispose of him quietly. According to one version of events, Yohannan’s henchmen took the elderly patriarch to the top of a mountain, threw him off a cliff and left him for dead. According to another, perhaps more credible, version, he was shut up in a cave and left to starve to death. Either way, the attempted murder miscarried. Whether lying unconscious at the foot of a cliff or fainting from lack of food and water, Hnanisho^c was discovered in the nick of time by a wandering shepherd. The patriarch was more dead than alive, and the shepherd took him home and nursed him back to health. When he was well enough to travel, he was taken to the monastery of Jonah near Mosul, whose monks sheltered him while he plotted his revenge on Yohannan the Leper.

Yohannan’s appointment had been deeply unpopular, and opposition to the usurper mounted when he replaced a number of bishops with his own favourites and sold off or pawned church plate, doubtless to raise enough money to keep the caliph sweet. Yohannan’s attempt on Hnanisho^c’s life was the last straw. The powerful metropolitans of Beth Garmai and Mosul threw their weight behind Hnanisho^c and encouraged him to fight back against the Leper. Claiming his legitimate rights as patriarch, Hnanisho^c deposed Yohannan. This act split the Church of the East into two factions. The churches of northern Mesopotamia lined up behind Hnanisho^c, while many of the southern churches continued to support Yohannan. At this juncture the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik intervened in

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the dispute, jailing Yohannan and some members of his family. Yohannan was able to bribe his way out of this misfortune, but his luck finally ran out with the appointment of al-Hajjaj as governor of Iraq. Al-Hajjaj, remembered by the Christians of the caliphate as a vindictive official who kept the 'people of the book' firmly in their place, imprisoned Yohannan for debt; and although he managed to escape from prison he died shortly afterwards in the suburbs of Kufa. Unfortunately for the Nestorian Church, the death of the usurper did not mean the restoration of Hnanisho^c. Perhaps because it would be too embarrassing for the caliph to swallow the triumph of the man he had deposed, al-Hajjaj prevented Hnanisho^c from resuming his position as patriarch. For the next few years Hnanisho^c governed the Church of the East from the monastery of Jonah, corresponding with the metropolitans of Nisibis, Erbil and Beth Garmai. He died shortly afterwards, in 698, nearly twelve years after his original election, and was buried in the monastery. Nearly seven centuries later, his body was exhumed there in spectacular circumstances.

Since the Arab conquest the Christians of Iraq had done their best to ignore the Muslims. On the whole Christians had been left in peace, so long as they paid the taxes, and for most of the seventh century the Umayyad caliphs were more interested in making money from the Christians than converting them to Islam. The forbearance of the conquerors came to an end during Hnanisho^c's reign, with the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in 692 by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik. The decision to place the Dome in Jerusalem was a calculated provocation. Jerusalem was a holy city to both Jews and Christians, and had few Muslim residents at this period. In later centuries it would also be claimed as a holy city by Muslims, as the scene of the *mi'raj*, Muhammad's miraculous ascension to heaven; but this association did not yet exist at the end of the seventh century. 'Abd al-Malik's decision to erect the Dome in Jerusalem was a studied affront to the Christians. The Qur'anic texts that decorated the Dome asserted the truth of Islam and the falsity of Christianity in the most uncompromising terms. They rebuked the Christians for 'claiming too much' for their religion. God was one, not three. He had no sons. Jesus, son of Mary, was merely a messenger of God, and worthy of respect only on that basis. This direct repudiation of Christian beliefs, in the Christians' holy city, showed Islam in a new and disquieting light. The Qur'an counselled Muslims to 'argue gently' with the 'people of the book', but the construction of the Dome of the Rock starkly demonstrated the limits of Muslim tolerance. The alarm felt by Christians throughout the caliphate was reflected in a wave of apocalyptic texts towards the turn of the eighth century, in which Christian writers wistfully prophesied the eventual downfall of Islam, and by the emergence of a polemical literature in defence of Christianity against the claims of Islam.

In other respects too, the completion of the Dome of the Rock signalled a shift in relations between the Muslims and the 'people of the book'. The Muslims were now thicker on the ground in the territories of the caliphate, far more firmly in control than they had been in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, and more interested in proselytising. Whereas they had earlier discouraged conversions to Islam, they now actively sought them. But the cash-strapped Umayyad caliphs also needed the money that the Christians provided, and these two imperatives often conflicted. Things worked best when they managed to get both cash and converts. The caliph 'Umar II (717–20), a zealous Muslim who enforced the laws of restriction against the Christians in their full rigour, destroying a number of recently-built churches, exempted Muslims from all taxes except *zakat*, the charitable donation required of them by the Qur'an. The result was a wave of conversions to Islam by Christians who saw in this exemption a tempting tax loophole. All Christians had to pay the poll tax (*jizyah*), the 'protection money' that proclaimed their inferior status, but Christian landowners also had to pay *kharaj*, a tax on agricultural land hitherto payable by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. 'Umar's decision to grant an exemption from *kharaj* to Muslims acted as a strong incentive for worldly Christian landowners to convert to Islam. Following the example of the Nestorians of Oman nearly a century earlier, who had risked their souls for the sake of their pockets, they became Muslims in order to benefit from 'Umar's new tax policy. Unfortunately for them, 'Umar's economists had miscalculated. The caliph soon discovered that he was losing too much revenue, and backtracked. The requirement to pay *kharaj* was reimposed on all recent converts to Islam, unless they were of Arab race. By that time, the damage to Christianity had already been done. Many of the new converts no doubt felt that they had been swindled; but they could hardly return to their old faith, as the penalty for apostasy from Islam was death.

The Eighth-Century Nestorian Patriarchs. The discontents of 'Umar's reign fell upon the Nestorian patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28), who succeeded Hnanisho^c I after a sixteen-year vacancy in the patriarchate. The vacancy was due to the malice of the Muslim authorities, who disciplined the Nestorian leaders for revolting against Yohannan the Leper by refusing to permit an election until it suited them. Sliba-zkha, a native of Tirhan, had earlier been bishop of Hormizd Ardashir, and was metropolitan of Adiabene at the time of his election. He declared the patriarchate of Yohannan the Leper illegitimate and rehabilitated the memory of Hnanisho^c I. He was an energetic patriarch, who reformed ecclesiastical laws, built schools, established two new metropolitan provinces for Samarqand and China and revived the old provinces of Herat and India, which must have fallen into abeyance. But

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he was also, according to Thomas of Marga, a proud and greedy man, who once attempted to steal a valuable decorated Bible from the monastery of Beth 'Abe.

Sliba-zkha died in 728, and the patriarchal throne remained unfilled for two years because the Nestorians could not agree on his successor. The smart money was at first on the bishop Aba of Kashkar. Aba pulled ahead of the field when his candidacy was endorsed by his likely rival Yohannan of Hirta, who admired his learning and ability. Yohannan's selfless endorsement should have clinched matters for Aba, but the Nestorians of Kashkar and Hirta had long been jealous of each other, and the 'devotees' of Hirta repudiated their bishop's lead. The electors thereupon dissolved into their usual cabals, and failed to agree upon a compromise candidate. With the election deadlocked, the caliph Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik (723–43) eventually imposed his own nominee, the bishop Pethion of Tirhan. It was a good choice. Pethion (731–40), a native of Beth Garmai, was a pious and honest man. According to the twelfth-century historian Mari, who accorded him his highest and rarest accolade for a Nestorian patriarch, he 'cared nothing for money'. He was also an administrator. As bishop of Tirhan he had established a clergy school in his diocese to improve the standard of education of its priests, and this example had been copied in other dioceses. Pethion was consecrated in 731 and sat for ten years, during which he ruled the Nestorian Church with great integrity, 'reviving the policies of Mar Aba' (in other words, deposing corrupt bishops). In this respect he had a great stroke of luck. The caliph Hisham was generally tolerant towards his *dhimmis*, and during Pethion's patriarchate Iraq was administered by one of the more sympathetic Umayyad provincial governors, Khalid al-Qasri. Khalid's mother was a Christian, and during his term of office he showed great consideration to Iraq's Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. However, he lacked discretion. He is said to have built his mother a church behind the mosque in Kufa, and to have claimed once that Christianity was superior to Islam. Unsurprisingly, he was abused by his enemies as a *ẓindīq* or freethinker. Khalid fell from power in 738, probably because Hisham was jealous of his excessive wealth but perhaps also because of his lack of zeal for Islam. Before his fall he had consulted regularly with Pethion on the affairs of the Christians, and 'treated him with great honour'. Never before had the Church of the East been so blessed in both its temporal and spiritual rulers, and rarely again would it enjoy such an auspicious conjunction of talent and goodwill. Whether they knew it or not, the Nestorians had reason to be grateful for the felicity of Pethion's reign.

Pethion was succeeded in 741 by the venerable bishop Aba of Kashkar, who had stood against him in the election of 731. Aba II (741–51), ninety years old when he first ran for patriarch and a centenarian at the time of his consecration,

was a respected scholar. He had been head of the school at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, where he had made his reputation with an erudite commentary on Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. At his consecration he modestly refused the honorific 'Mar', claiming that he did not wish to be confused with the illustrious Mar Aba the Great. Before he took up residence in Seleucia-Ctesiphon he went to Kufa to confront Yusuf, one of the sons of 'Umar II, who had recently replaced the disgraced Khalid al-Qasri as governor of Iraq. At the time of Aba's accession, according to Mari, the new governor was 'hatefully persecuting the Christians'. He evidently took after his father. Remarkably, Aba made a good impression on him, and secured redress for some of the injustices the Christians had suffered. Aba II never repeated this initial triumph. Unsurprisingly, given his age, he spent the rest of his patriarchate in study rather than active administration. In 747 'certain clerics' removed the patriarchal school in Seleucia-Ctesiphon from his authority, in order to enjoy its revenues. Bewildered and offended by this turn of events, he left Seleucia-Ctesiphon and withdrew to a monastery near Kashkar. He lived there for the next three years, while the bishops Milas of Tirhan and Shahdost of Zabe deputised for him. Beyond the walls of Aba's monastery, stirring events were taking place. In 750, the last year of Aba's reign, the Umayyad dynasty collapsed in the wake of a massive uprising in Khorasan. The last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, was defeated near the Great Zab river by al-Saffah, who deposed him and established the 'Abbasid dynasty. Al-Saffah initially ruled from Kufa, where Aba went to salute him. In 751, not long after his visit to the new caliph, the elderly Aba died, allegedly at the age of 110.

The new 'Abbasid rulers, according to Bar Hebraeus, 'were better disposed towards the Christians' than their predecessors had been, and there can be little doubt that, from the point of view of the captive Christian Churches, they were a distinct improvement on the Umayyads. For the next two centuries the caliphate would be dominated not by uncouth Arab warriors but by suave, well-read Persians, heirs to a fine cultural and administrative tradition. The Arabic language gained a new word, *isti'jam* (from 'Ajam, an Arabic name for Persia), to describe this era of 'persianisation', and under the relatively enlightened patronage of the 'Abbasid caliphs the caliphate's Jewish and Christian intellectuals found themselves valued more highly than they had been by their Umayyad predecessors. As far as the Christians were concerned, the Nestorians benefited more than the Jacobites and the Melkites from the change of dynasty, as their patriarch was once again close to the seat of power, as he had not been since the fall of the Sasanian Empire. The later Umayyad caliphs had governed the caliphate from remote Damascus, but the 'Abbasid caliphs resided in Iraq. They changed their capital several times, from Kufa to Baghdad, from Baghdad to Samarra, and from Samarra back to

Baghdad again; but all three cities were within easy reach of the patriarchs of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Of course, proximity to the seat of power cut both ways, depending on the personality of individual caliphs. Sometimes it could be a blessing not to be at court. But it was on the whole more advantageous for the Nestorian patriarchs to enjoy direct access to the caliph than to deal with him through the governors of Iraq, as they had done for most of the Umayyad period. As the Nestorians themselves put it, somewhat irreverently, 'It is better to speak directly to God than to his saints'.

After the death of Aba II the patriarchal throne remained vacant for two years due to a dispute over the succession between the metropolitans Surin of Hulwan and Ya'qob of Elam. Surin had previously been metropolitan of Nisibis, and it was said that he had used underhand methods to secure this appointment. He sought the patriarchate in a similar spirit, selling off church plate and curtains to raise money to bribe Aban, the Arab governor of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, to support his candidature. Aban compelled the other metropolitans to enthrone Surin, but the ceremony ended in disarray. A number of bishops were unwilling to accept the eucharist from his hand and Ya'qob of Elam, urged by the governor to complete the ceremony by laying his hands upon the new patriarch, refused to comply. Ya'qob then complained about this irregular election to the caliph al-Saffah (750-4), who deposed Aban, ordered the church furnishings to be restored to their owners, and directed that another election should be held. Surin was thrown into prison after a reign of only fifty-one days, and Ya'qob was canonically elected in his place.

Ya'qob II (753-73) governed the Church of the East for twenty years until his death in 773, but spent seven of these years in a prison cell. His troubles began only months after his election, and to a certain extent were of his own making. He consecrated new bishops for a number of dioceses, to replace those ordained by Surin during his brief reign. Inevitably, some of Surin's nominees refused to give up their positions, and the result was a tedious wrangle until they could be removed. Although this brief schism was not on the scale of those of Narsai and Elisha^c and Hnanisho^c I and Yohannan the Leper, it was nevertheless damaging to the morale of the Nestorian Church, and gave comfort to the Jacobites. Ya'qob was also persuaded to treat Surin with a generosity which he certainly did not deserve. Urged by a number of peacemakers to be reconciled with his rival, he used his good offices with the caliph to secure Surin's release. He then appointed him metropolitan of Maishan, but the Christians of Prath d'Maishan refused to receive him. Surin responded to this generosity by intriguing against the patriarch to recover his former dignity, and there was so much unrest as a result that the caliph al-Mansur (754-75) impatiently jailed both Ya'qob and Surin to put an

end to their dispute, and asked his ambitious Christian doctor ʿIsa bar Shahlaḥfa to direct the affairs of the Church of the East instead.

Surin, undeterred by his renewed imprisonment, conducted a campaign of vilification against Yaʿqob from his prison cell, seeking to detach the bishops from their loyalty to the new patriarch and to encourage Muslim governors to persecute Christians who recognised Yaʿqob’s authority. According to Mari, many Christians converted to Islam as a result. Yaʿqob’s bishops took the opportunity of a friendly visit by al-Mansur to the monastery of Beth Hale near Hdatta to plead the imprisoned patriarch’s cause. The moment seemed propitious. The caliph was in a good mood, and not only exempted the monastery from taxes but ordered that it should be subsidised from the state treasury, because its monks provided hospitality free of charge to Muslim travellers. All should have gone well, but the caliph suddenly noticed the bishop Shlemun of Hdatta among the ranks of the welcoming committee. Shlemun was one of the few Nestorian bishops who was not afraid to speak out against the oppression of the civil authorities, and as a result he had made himself *persona non grata* with the caliph and his advisers. Some years earlier he had antagonised the Muslim governor of Hdatta by protesting against the imposition of higher taxes, and had earned himself a severe flogging for his defiance. A little while later he was flogged again on the direct orders of al-Mansur, after being falsely accused of the theft of state goods by a number of disgruntled Christians from his own church, whom he had excommunicated (‘with good reason’, according to Mari). The second flogging had been administered in the Nestorian monastery of Mar Shemʿon in Shenna d’Beth Ramman, in the presence of the assembled monks, doubtless as an object lesson. Al-Mansur now flew into a rage at the very sight of this troublemaker. Far from ordering Yaʿqob’s release, he had Shlemun thrown into prison alongside him.

The continued imprisonment of the patriarch suited ʿIsa bar Shahlaḥfa very well, and he used his influence with the caliph to have Theodoret, patriarch of the Melkites, and Giwargis, patriarch of the Jacobites, arrested as well. The three patriarchs shared a common imprisonment for the next seven years. They were released only because ʿIsa overreached himself. ʿIsa used his access to al-Mansur to enrich himself. Eventually, he grew overconfident, and made the mistake of demanding a bribe from the powerful Nestorian metropolitan Cyprian of Nisibis. He wrote to Cyprian, inviting him to donate all the gold and silver plate in the churches of Nisibis to the caliph’s treasury. Such a demand might not by itself have entailed ʿIsa’s downfall, but the Nestorian doctor also boasted that he himself was the real power in the land, and that al-Mansur was a mere puppet. Cyprian saw his chance, and hastened to the caliph’s court with this incriminating evidence. There, at the head of a delegation of Christian nobles and bishops,

he presented al-Mansur with ʿIsa’s damning letter. The caliph reproached ʿIsa bitterly for betraying his confidence, and the over-mighty Nestorian doctor was disgraced. He was lucky to escape with his life; but al-Mansur, in an unusually merciful mood, merely sentenced him to exile. The caliph also made amends to the Christians. The three Christian patriarchs were released, and Cyprian of Nisibis became one of the caliph’s intimates. Yaʿqob II died soon after his release. Surin, whose prison sentence was confirmed by al-Mansur, escaped from jail, but was recaptured in Seleucia-Ctesiphon and died soon afterwards.

One of the more notable events of Yaʿqob’s reign was the conclusion of a deal between the Nestorian and the Jacobite Churches which allowed the Nestorians a foothold in Jacobite Tagrit and the Jacobites a corresponding lodgement in Nestorian Nisibis. The initiative for this bilateral agreement came from the Nestorian bishop Sliba-zkha of Tirhan, whose diocese included Tagrit. Sliba-zkha is first mentioned in 753, when he was imprisoned along with the patriarch Yaʿqob during Surin’s brief schism. He was released shortly afterwards, and ‘began to restore the churches in Tirhan’. He also won permission from the Jacobite authorities for the construction of a Nestorian church in Tagrit, in return for the restoration to the Jacobites of the church of Mar Domitius in Nisibis, which the Nestorians had confiscated some decades earlier. This agreement, which required the consent of the Jacobite maphrian Paul and the Nestorian metropolitan Cyprian of Nisibis, was probably concluded in 756. Construction of the Nestorian church in Tagrit began in 767, on a site by the Tigris adjacent to the city’s outer wall. The church was still in existence in the thirteenth century, when it was remarked upon by Bar Hebraeus. The Nestorian community in Tagrit was never large, however, and the city had ten Jacobite churches against only a single Nestorian church.

Yaʿqob II was succeeded by Hnanishoʿ II (773–80), who was imposed upon the Church of the East by the caliph al-Mahdi (774–85) on the advice of his Christian doctor ʿIsa bar Quraysh. Hnanishoʿ was the bishop of Lashom in Beth Garmai, and enjoyed the support of the clergy of Hirta and Beth Garmai. Others urged the claims of the monk Giwargis of the monastery of Beth Hale, for the interesting reason that he was fluent in both Syriac, Persian and Arabic. As so often happened, neither party was willing to withdraw, and the matter was referred for the caliph’s arbitration. Al-Mahdi summoned both candidates to a debate, in which he tested their learning and *savoir faire*. He began, mischievously, by asking them why they did not convert to Islam. Giwargis remained silent, but Hnanishoʿ replied blandly that his Arabic was not good enough. This sly personal attack on Giwargis greatly amused the caliph. Al-Mahdi then asked about the famous rod of Moses, which had worked so many miracles. What wood had it been made of?

Giwargis again floundered, saying merely that the Bible did not specify. Hnanisho^c replied confidently that it had been made of almond wood, and wrenched several biblical verses out of context to support his answer. The caliph, delighted at his resourcefulness, declared Hnanisho^c the winner and ordered that he should be appointed patriarch. The aggrieved Giwargis complained that Hnanisho^c had cheated, but nobody listened to him.

Little is known of the events of Hnanisho^c's reign, and his few known initiatives have sometimes been ascribed to his celebrated successor Timothy I (780–823), who may not have been averse to taking the credit for their success. Hnanisho^c seems to have been responsible for tracking down and compiling the surviving records of the synods of the Church of the East from the fifth century onwards, creating a body of canon law that became the basis for the administration of the Church of the East for centuries to come. This compilation, usually known as the *Synodicon Orientale*, was later published under Timothy's name, but the groundwork had almost certainly been done by Hnanisho^c. Timothy is often credited with another important decision taken by his predecessor. In 775 Hnanisho^c decided to move the seat of the Nestorian patriarchs from Seleucia-Ctesiphon to Baghdad, the recently-founded capital of the 'Abbasid caliphs. Seleucia-Ctesiphon, or al-Mada'in ('the twin cities') as the Arabs called the Sasanian metropolis, by now retained only a shadow of its former greatness, and Hnanisho^c II doubtless wished to be close to his patron al-Mahdi in Baghdad. He gained little profit personally from the move. He died in Baghdad in 780 in suspicious circumstances after surgery for a minor ailment. One rumour said that one of his enemies, the influential doctor Abu'l-'Abbas al-Tusa, had coated the scalpel used in the operation with poison.

Nevertheless, the move to Baghdad had important consequences for the future history of the Church of the East. For the next five hundred years, except for a ninth-century interlude when the caliphs moved their capital to Samarra, the patriarchs of the Nestorian Church normally resided at Baghdad. They still went to al-Mada'in for their consecration, and continued to call themselves patriarchs of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, but they lived close to the caliphs in the 'Abbasid capital. Baghdad, founded by al-Mansur on a relatively modest scale, soon outgrew its early confines, and during the middle ages came to rank as one of the leading cities of the world. During the high 'Abbasid period it was one of the world's foremost centres of learning, and a vibrant site of debate among Muslim, Christian and Jewish intellectuals. During the ninth and tenth centuries Nestorian Christians would play a prominent part in the capital's intellectual endeavours. The Nestorian patriarchs, who frequented the caliph's court and were members of his council of state, enjoyed considerable consequence under the more reasonable Muslim rulers.

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With Hnanisho's move to Baghdad, the stage was set for the most glamorous period in the history of the Church of the East: the age of Timothy I.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

Gains and Losses. Once the excitements of the Arab conquest had died down, the Umayyad period was one of considerable stability for the Church of the East. The Umayyad caliphs were more interested in taxing Christians than converting them, and several new dioceses were founded in the seventh and eighth centuries in Beth Aramaye and the northern provinces of Nisibis and Erbil during the 'window of opportunity' provided by the eclipse of the Zoroastrians. Bishops were also appointed for Nestorian communities in Damascus and other towns that had once been under Roman control, though these communities were never large. But there were also losses, most notoriously in Beth Qatraye. It is difficult to map these developments precisely, as far less is known about the ecclesiastical organisation of the Church of the East in the Umayyad period than in the Sasanian and 'Abbasid periods. Although the literary sources for the period, particularly Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors*, often mention the names of dioceses and their bishops, they do so unsystematically, and are no substitute for the synodical acts of the Sasanian period. Unfortunately, the only set of synodical acts to survive from the Umayyad period are those of the local synod of Dairin in 676. Nevertheless, a sensitive use of the literary sources enables the ecclesiastical organisation of the Church of the East during the seventh and eighth centuries to be inferred with a fair degree of certainty.

The Mesopotamian Provinces. In the province of the patriarch, the seven dioceses attested in the late Sasanian period (Kashkar, Zabe, Hirta, Beth Daraye, Tirhan, Piroz Shabur and Shenna d'Beth Ramman) seem to have continued uneventfully. Two eighth-century patriarchs, Sliba-zkha (714–28) and Pethion (731–41), were earlier bishops of Piroz Shabur and Tirhan respectively. Two new dioceses were founded during the Umayyad period: Radhan, and Qasr and Nahrawan. The diocese of Radhan is first mentioned in a letter of Timothy I (780–823), who said that he intended to consecrate a bishop for Radhan to replace the diocese's previous incumbent, Nestorius, who had recently died. Although no bishops of Qasr and Nahrawan are known before the ninth century, the diocese was clearly founded before the end of the seventh century, as Mari mentioned a visit by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (685–705) to 'the church of the throne of the White Fortress (*al-qasr al-abyad*)'. The seat of the bishops of Mahoze d'Arewan in the

province of Beth Garmai was moved to Konishapur (Beth Waziq) around the middle of the seventh century, and before the end of the century the diocese of Beth Waziq was transferred to the province of the patriarch. By 780 there seem to have been at least ten dioceses in this province.

Life also continued relatively uneventfully in the two southern provinces of Beth Huzaye and Maishan, though signs of decline were evident. Six of the seven dioceses attested at the end of the Sasanian period in Beth Huzaye (Jundishapur, Karka d'Ledan, Hormizd Ardashir, Shushter, Susa and Ispahan) and all four dioceses in Maishan (Prath d'Maishan, Karka d'Maishan, Rima and Nahargur) persisted throughout the Umayyad period, though few of their bishops are known. The diocese of Ram Hormizd in Beth Huzaye probably lapsed shortly after the Arab conquest. Its last-known bishop was present at the synod of Isho'yahb I in 585, and there is no further mention of the diocese. Its loss was probably significant. While some of the monasteries founded under the Sasanians, such as the monastery of Rabban Shabor near Shushter, continued to function for centuries after the Arab conquest, the provinces of Beth Huzaye and Maishan are rarely mentioned in the literary sources at this period. The persistence of most of the traditional Nestorian dioceses may have masked a fall in the number of Christians in southern Mesopotamia during the first centuries of Arab rule.

In the province of Nisibis, the six stable dioceses attested in the late Sasanian period (Arzun, Beth Zabdai, Qardu, Balad, Shigar and Beth Kartwaye) persisted uneventfully into the Umayyad period. The diocese of Armenia, first attested in 424, was probably attached to the province of Nisibis shortly after the Arab conquest. By now, its bishops certainly sat in the town of Akhlāt on the northern shore of Lake Van. One of the few known bishops of Akhlāt in the Umayyad period, an author named Ya'qob included in the fourteenth-century list of 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, flourished during the reign of the patriarch Pethion (731–40). The Arab conquest also allowed the Nestorians to move into western Mesopotamia and plant communities in towns that had formerly been in Roman territory, where they lived alongside much larger Jacobite, Armenian and Melkite communities. By the end of the seventh century there were significant Nestorian communities in Syria and Palestine. Indeed, in at least one case the Nestorians jumped the gun, establishing a diocese for Damascus during the Persian occupation of Syria in the early years of the seventh century. This diocese survived the wars of Heraclius and the Arab conquest, and was attached to the province of Nisibis. A diocese was also established during the seventh century for Raqqā. This diocese included the town of Harran, famed for the persistence of its paganism, and was also assigned to the province of Nisibis. The intriguingly-named 'Gregory the alchemist', one of the earliest-known bishops of Raqqā, also flourished during Pethion's reign.

The metropolitans of Adiabene continued to sit at Erbil, and the six suffragan dioceses attested in the late Sasanian period (Beth Nuhadra, Beth Bgash, Beth Dasen, Hnitha, Hdatta and Nineveh) persisted uneventfully into the 'Abbasid period. Three new dioceses were founded during the Umayyad period: Marga, Salakh and Hebton. The dioceses of Marga and Salakh, covering the districts around 'Amadiya, 'Aqra and Rawanduz, are first mentioned in the eighth century but may have been created earlier. Marga, certainly, had been a Jacobite diocese since 629, and it is difficult to believe that the Nestorians would have ignored such a challenge for long. Most of what is known about the Nestorian dioceses of Marga and Salakh derives from the ninth-century author Thomas of Marga, who mentioned several of their bishops in the *Book of Governors*, his celebrated history of the monastery of Beth 'Abe in Marga. The diocese of Hebton, a district in northwest Adiabene to the south of the Great Zab opposite Marga, was probably also founded around the end of the seventh century. These three dioceses were probably founded partly in response to Jacobite competition in the Mosul region and partly in response to immigration by Nestorian Christians from southern Mesopotamia. In the rural districts around Mosul, Christians accounted for well over half of the population, and many villages were entirely Christian. The attractions of immigration were obvious. The incomers had no Muslim neighbours to pressure them to convert to Islam, and no direct contact with the Muslim authorities. Provided they paid the poll tax regularly to the local *dihqans*, they were free to worship as they pleased.

On the eve of the Arab conquest there were seven dioceses in the province of Beth Garmai (Karka d'Beth Slokh, Shahrgard, Lashom, Mahoze d'Arewan, Hrbath Glal, Tahal and Shahrzur). Six of these dioceses persisted without disturbance into the 'Abbasid period, but the seat of the bishops of Mahoze d'Arewan was moved to the town of Konishapur (Beth Waziq) around the middle of the seventh century, and before the end of the century the diocese (now renamed Beth Waziq) was transferred to the province of the patriarch.

Iran, Arabia, Central Asia and India. At the beginning of the seventh century there were perhaps a dozen dioceses in Fars and northern Arabia. Christian communities persisted in Fars for several centuries after the Arab conquest, and the sparse references to these communities in the surviving literary sources suggest that they were more concerned with their own parochial squabbles than with the relentless march of Islam. The eighth-century monastic reformer Yohannan of Dailam was once forced to separate the monks of a Nestorian monastery near Arrajan after a quarrel over the language of worship. The Persian monks demanded that services should be conducted in Persian, while the monks from northern Mesopotamia

stood out for Syriac. As far as is known, the diocesan structure in Fars itself persisted without great change during the Umayyad period, as the five traditional dioceses (Rev Ardashir, Bih Shapur, Istakhr, Ardashir Khurra and Darabgird) were still in existence in the ninth century. But while the names of several seventh- and eighth-century metropolitans of Fars are known, very little is known about the province's suffragan dioceses during the Umayyad period. The sources do not mention the name of a single bishop of the four suffragan dioceses.

If there was considerable continuity in Fars itself, Nestorian Christianity in northern Arabia withered quickly away after the Arab conquest. It is clear from the correspondence between Isho'yahb III (649–59) and the metropolitan Shem'on of Fars that the Arabs gave the Christians of Oman the usual choice between conversion to Islam and paying the poll tax. Many converted, and Isho'yahb roundly condemned them for choosing to save their money rather than their souls. This may have been too harsh a judgement. Arabia was the birthplace of Islam and the Muslim authorities, on the insistence of the prophet Muhammad shortly before his death, were determined to purge the peninsula of other religions. As a result, the Christians of Beth Qatraye and Beth Mazunaye came under far greater social pressure to convert than their counterparts in northern Iraq; and although Beth Qatraye produced two of the most important Nestorian authors of the late seventh century, Isaac of Nineveh and Dadisho' Qatraya, the long-term future for Christianity in the region was bleak. The results of Muslim pressure soon became evident. Of the northern Arabian dioceses, Mashmahig is last reliably mentioned around 650, and Dairin, Beth Mazunaye, Hagar and Hatta in 676, when their bishops attended the synod convened at Dairin in that year by the patriarch Giwargis I. The loss of these dioceses was a heavy blow. Christians could still be found in Qatar and Oman in small numbers as late as the tenth century, but by the eleventh century Christianity had been virtually eliminated from northern Arabia. On the other side of the peninsula, however, the Nestorian communities in Najran and Yemen stubbornly maintained their Christian identity. There were dioceses for both communities in the 'Abbasid period, which possibly dated back to Sasanian times. There are no references to bishops of Najran and Yemen during the Umayyad period, but so little is known about the Nestorian Christians of Arabia that it would be unsafe to conclude that they did not exist.

Christianity in western Iran during the Umayyad period seems to have declined from an early peak. The patriarch Isho'yahb II (628–45) raised the diocese of Hulwan to metropolitan status shortly after his accession, in recognition of the growing importance of the city of Hulwan during the final decades of Sasanian rule. Hulwan replaced Hamadan as the summer capital of the Sasanian kings towards the end of the sixth century, and on the eve of the Arab conquest had a

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considerably larger Christian population than its old rival. There was presumably a regular succession of bishops in the dioceses of Hulwan and Hamadan throughout the Umayyad period, as both dioceses were still flourishing in the ninth century, but the only bishop who has left his mark on history was the metropolitan Surin of Hulwan, who briefly became patriarch in 753 after the death of Aba II. However, the diocese of Masabadan probably lapsed during the Umayyad period, as it was not included among the suffragan dioceses of Hulwan in the ninth-century list of Eliya of Damascus.

In Khorasan and Segestan, the balance between the Nestorians and the Jacobites had been upset shortly before the Arab conquest by an influx of Jacobite deportees from Edessa. There were now more Jacobites than Nestorians in these two provinces, and many Nestorians must have defected to the Jacobite Church during the seventh and eighth centuries. The Nestorian diocese of Herat had been raised to metropolitan status in the second half of the sixth century, but it may be significant that the patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28) is said to have consecrated metropolitans for Samarqand, India and China, and also for Herat. He was clearly interested in strengthening the dioceses of the mission field, and in the case of Segestan may have been reacting to the challenge of the Jacobites. If so, his initiative does not seem to have turned back the clock. By 790, according to the Nestorian patriarch Timothy I, Segestan was ‘under the thumb of the Severans’. The Nestorian dioceses of Merv, Herat and Segestan clearly persisted throughout the Umayyad period, as they are all attested as late as the ninth century, but it is not clear whether the Nestorians had other dioceses in these two provinces after the Arab conquest.

Although the Nestorians were on the defensive in Khorasan and Segestan, they consolidated their presence in Transoxiana. In 644 the metropolitan Eliya of Merv converted large numbers of Turks ‘beyond the border line’ (the Oxus river), after impressing the king of a Turkish tribe with a miracle. This event offers an attractive context for the foundation of the Nestorian diocese of Samarqand or ‘the country of the Turks’ (Beth Turkaye), whose origin and early history are shrouded in mystery. The Nestorian patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28) raised the diocese to metropolitan status, another indication of the flourishing condition of Christianity in Transoxiana in the seventh and eighth centuries. In the first half of the seventh century the Nestorians also followed the Silk Road beyond the Jaxartes to its eastern terminus in Ch’ang-an (modern Sian), the capital of T’ang China. For a long period, perhaps for centuries, there may have been no other Nestorian dioceses along the immense stretch of the Silk Road between Samarqand and Ch’ang-an; but it is certain that Nestorian missionaries fanned out and preached to the intervening Turkish tribes, even though it is rarely possible

to assign dates to their activity. In the eighth century the Uighurs were Christians before they became Manicheans, and Nestorian missionaries may already have been working as far afield as Mongolia.

During the Umayyad period attempts were made by the Nestorian patriarchs to bring the Saint Thomas Christians of India firmly under their control, but with only limited success. At the time of the Arab conquest the Christians of India and Soqatra were still dependent on the metropolitans of Fars, who gave only grudging allegiance to the bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The patriarch Isho'yahb III is said to have raised India to metropolitan status, detaching it from the province of Fars. One of Isho'yahb's complaints against the metropolitan Shem'on of Fars was that he had refused to consecrate a bishop for 'Kalnah', because the Saint Thomas Christians had offended him in some way. The diocese of 'Kalnah' has been fancifully sought as far afield as Malaya, but it is clear from the context that Isho'yahb had in mind a diocese in India, and just as clear that he was referring to Quilon (the 'Calliana' of Cosmas Indicopleustes). A delegation of Indian Christians is said to have arrived in Alexandria at the end of the seventh century to ask the Coptic patriarch to send them bishops. Missionaries were indeed sent, but were intercepted by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik and killed. This story, if it is not completely legendary, may reflect continuing tensions between Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Fars and India. According to the fourteenth-century writer 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, the patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28) consecrated a metropolitan for India, just as he did for Herat, Samarqand and China. However, Sliba-zkha's attempt to detach India from Fars was no more successful than that of Isho'yahb III before him. By 780 India was again dependent on the metropolitans of Fars, and was only definitively removed from their jurisdiction by the patriarch Timothy I (780–823).

The Nestorian Mission to China. The Church of the East is perhaps best known nowadays for its missionary work in China during the T'ang dynasty. The Nestorian mission to China has long fascinated scholars of a romantic temperament, and much has been made of the fact that Christian monks from Iraq and Persia brought the Christian message to the Chinese capital Ch'ang-an (modern Sian) nearly a thousand years before the first Jesuit missionaries arrived in the country. In fact, it is not surprising to find Nestorian Christians in Ch'ang-an in the early decades of the seventh century. Trade along the Silk Road was flourishing, and now that the Nestorians were across the Oxus it was inevitable that they would one day follow the Road to its eastern terminus in China. Ch'ang-an, their destination, was the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the world, and was used to dealing with foreigners. Many of its Chinese inhabitants were Buddhists, but the city was a magnet for foreign traders, and by the eighth century had small but significant

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Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Manichean and Hindu communities. As in modern Hong Kong, Buddhist temples jostled for space with mosques, churches, synagogues and other more exotic places of worship. The true surprise is not that the Nestorians found their way to Ch'ang-an, but that they were not joined in this agreeable location by Jacobite, Melkite and Armenian Christians. The Jacobites, certainly, were aware of the Nestorian mission to China, and their thriving communities in Khorasan and Segestan were well placed to follow their rivals. But there is no hint that they ever did so. The comprehensive lists of episcopal consecrations between the ninth and twelfth centuries compiled by the Jacobite patriarch Michael the Syrian (1166–99) mention several Jacobite bishops of Khorasan and Segestan, but none of China. A century later Bar Hebraeus casually mentioned a ninth-century Jacobite bishop in India, suggesting that the Jacobites were not entirely averse to mounting poaching expeditions into Nestorian territory, but he too never referred to a Jacobite presence in China, and would doubtless have done so had there been one. The explanation, surely, is that the Nestorians were determined to keep China to themselves, and reacted as fiercely in the seventh century to competition as they did in the thirteenth century, when the cosy Chinese monopoly they enjoyed under Mongol protection was threatened by Latin missionaries.

The principal source for the Nestorian mission to T'ang China is a tablet erected in 781 in the grounds of a Nestorian monastery in the Ch'ang-an by its monks. This tablet, familiarly known as the Sian Tablet, bore a long inscription in Chinese, with occasional glosses in Syriac, describing the eventful progress of a Christian mission to 'the rulers of the Chinese' launched one and a half centuries earlier by a Nestorian missionary with the Chinese name A-lo-pen. A-lo-pen (the name seems to mean 'God is my origin', and may represent a Chinese rendering of the Syriac name Yahballaha, 'God has given') was received in the Chinese capital in 635 by Fang Hsuan-ling, one of the closest aides of the emperor T'ai-tsung (599–649), so his mission must have been carefully prepared. The emperor's advisers read what A-lo-pen had to say about the Christian faith and granted Christianity their seal of approval in an imperial decree of 638. 'Truth can be recognised, whatever its name: wisdom can be discerned, whoever its possessor,' ran the preamble to this decree. A-lo-pen was given permission to open a monastery for twenty-one monks in Ch'ang-an's I-ning ward, on a prime piece of real estate close to the centre of the Chinese capital.

During the reign of T'ai-tsung's successor Kao-tsung (649–83), according to the Sian Tablet inscription, Christianity spread 'throughout the ten provinces' and monasteries could be found 'in a hundred cities' in China. Too many scholars have taken this absurd hyperbole seriously. A more accurate estimate

of the progress of Christianity in T'ang China is to be found in a Buddhist inscription of 824, which boasted that there were more Buddhist temples in a single Chinese town than Manichean, Zoroastrian and Christian foundations in the whole of China. This contemptuous assessment probably goes too far in the opposite direction, but is closer to the truth. Only about a dozen Christian settlements in T'ang China can be confirmed, and they are where they might reasonably be expected to be: along the Silk Road, in the two northern capitals of Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang, and in the main southern seaports. A second monastery was built in Ch'ang-an during Kao-tsung's reign, sponsored by the Persian prince Piroz, who had taken refuge in China after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. There was also a monastery in Lo-yang, China's second city. There were also monasteries or churches in the Silk Road station of Tun-huang near Sha-chou and in a number of towns in Ning-hsia province (modern Kansu) on the main road to Ch'ang-an. The southern coastal port of Canton also had a small Christian community and there were probably also Christians in the Fukienese port of Ch'uan-chou, though no source specifically mentions them. Christians in T'ang China probably numbered a few thousand at most. It is unlikely that there were many Christian communities in central China, and the only inland Chinese city south of the Yellow River where a Nestorian presence can be confirmed in the T'ang dynasty is Ch'eng-tu. The heroic attempts made in the first half of the twentieth century by Christian missionaries to identify eighth-century Nestorian monasteries in every major town in China entirely fail to convince. During the reign of the empress Wu Tse-t'ien (690–704), a committed Buddhist, there was a mild reaction against the Christian presence in Ch'ang-an, and A-lo-pen's monastery may have been closed for a few months. There was another brief period of unpleasantness during the second reign of the emperor Jui-tsung (710–12), but the Nestorians soon recovered, and during the reign of the celebrated emperor Hsuan-tsung (714–56) they enjoyed several decades of prosperity. A number of Nestorian bishops were sent to China during this period, some travelling overland along the Silk Road and others entering China via Canton. The patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28), who was determined to give greater visibility to the far-flung Nestorian dioceses of the mission field, raised the diocese of China to metropolitan status along with those of Herat, Samarkand and India. The province of China was called Beth Sinaye in Syriac, though the Persian Christians who dominated the Nestorian missions to the East also called it Sinistan, the Persian form of the name. By the fourteenth century some enthusiasts were trying to backdate the establishment of the province of Beth Sinaye, arguing that it had been founded either by the fifth-century patriarch Ahha (410–14) or the sixth-century patriarch Shila (503–23). These

absurd claims were decisively refuted by 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, who observed that the position of Beth Sinaye in the list of exterior provinces necessarily implied an eighth-century foundation.

In 745, doubtless because the T'ang court was now better informed about the various Western religions whose missionaries had set up their stalls in China during the previous century, the Christians were given a new official identity. Hitherto, Christianity had been known as 'the Persian teaching of the scriptures' (*Po-ssu ching-chiao*), and Nestorian monasteries were called 'Persian monasteries' (*Po-ssu ssu*). But there were Zoroastrians in China too, who had a far better claim to a Persian identity than the Christians. Christianity had in fact been founded not in Persia but in Ta-ch'in (the Chinese term for Syria and Palestine), so Hsuan-tsung instructed the Christians to rename their buildings 'Syrian monasteries' (*Ta-ch'in ssu*). The text of the imperial decree ordering this change has survived, and the new names were prominently displayed at the entrances to the two Christian monasteries in Ch'ang-an, in a facsimile of the emperor's own calligraphy. Probably at the same time, and certainly before 781, the Christians dropped the colourless term 'teaching of the scriptures' and began calling Christianity 'the brilliant teaching of Syria' (*Ta-ch'in ching-chiao*). This was a much more striking name, and they underlined the attractions of their new corporate identity by adopting an unusual and eye-catching variant of the Chinese character *ching*, 'brilliant'.

MONASTICISM

Monastic Life after the Arab Conquest. During the final decades of Sasanian rule a score of new Nestorian monasteries sprung up among the hills of northern Iraq. Some of these monasteries were planned, in accordance with the deliberate policy of Abraham of Kashkar. Others were founded as the result of quarrels over discipline or doctrine. Such quarrels were prone to arise in this highly-strung society of Christian over-achievers, and when they did the aggrieved losers often left the scene of their defeat and built a new monastery somewhere else. This process of creative fission continued into the Umayyad period. For several decades, the Muslims were so thin on the ground that Christian life in the hills of Adiabene continued much as though the Arab conquest had never happened. During this period a number of new convents were built, including the monasteries of Mar Isaac of Nineveh near the village of Shakh in Beth Zabdai, Mar Ahha the Egyptian just outside Gazarta, and Mar 'Abdisho' of Kom near the village of Deiri in the Sapna valley. All three monasteries were still functioning, if only intermittently, as late as the nineteenth century.

The extremism of the early Christian centuries had by now somewhat faded, and in most of these monasteries the monks lived the conventional communal life envisaged by Abraham of Kashkar. Many monasteries were located just off the main roads, and often provided accommodation for travellers. Their monks lived a blameless existence tilling the fields, studying scripture and treatises on the monastic life, and endearing themselves to modern scholars by copying manuscripts. The monastery of Beth Hale near Hdatta, which the caliph al-Mansur exempted from tax because it offered hospitality to Muslim travellers, was typical of such worthy 'faith-based' community institutions. The monks from these monasteries, who were well educated and devout, supplied the Nestorian Church with many of its bishops and patriarchs, and also with its most committed missionaries.

Nevertheless, exhibitionism had not entirely died out, either among the Nestorians or the Jacobites, and a sense of the possibilities open to *ibidaye* during the Umayyad period can be gleaned from Dadisho^c Qatraya's seventh-century *Discourse on Solitude*, a study of the lifestyle and motivation of solitary monks. According to Dadisho^c, the solitaries tended to live in or around the more remote and inaccessible monasteries, and there were six different degrees of solitude. At one end of the spectrum were the young novices, who remained in the community all the time. There were also monks who lived in their cells for most of the week, but who emerged on Saturday evenings to join the rest of the community; monks who disappeared in search of peace and quiet during Lent and the other fasts of the ecclesiastical year; hermits, who generally kept themselves to themselves but were not averse to visits from admiring fans on occasion; and itinerant solitaries, who trudged along the dusty footpaths of northern Iraq begging their bread from sympathetic Christian villagers. Finally there were the extreme anchorites, who snappishly discouraged any human contact and lived entirely on their own.

The History of Rabban Hormizd the Persian. In theory, this wide range of monastic possibilities should have provided opportunities for a display of all the Christian virtues. In practice, monastic life throughout the Umayyad period was embittered by partisan clashes between the Nestorians and the Jacobites. No doubt Nestorian monks lived quietly and soberly enough in districts where there was no provocative Jacobite presence; but in the Mosul plain and the hill country around 'Amadiya and 'Aqra, where Nestorians and Jacobites lived cheek by jowl, their monks spent much of their energies fighting among themselves. Law and order in northern Iraq largely broke down during the decades of the Arab conquest, and warring bands of Nestorian and Jacobite monks terrorised the villages and monasteries of Adiabene and Beth Nuhadra almost with impunity. This power vacuum was

only gradually filled by the Muslim conquerors. Lawless clashes between the Nestorians and Jacobites of northern Iraq persisted for several decades after the Arab conquest, and large-scale violence was only suppressed towards the end of the seventh century, when the Umayyad caliphs finally mastered the chaos created by the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. Several Nestorian monastic histories mention strife and violence in the countryside beyond Mosul during the Umayyad period; and one text, the *History of Rabban Hormizd the Persian*, is of particular interest because it glorified these unedifying clashes.

The *History*, written around the middle of the seventh century by Hormizd's disciple Shem'on and translated into English by Wallis Budge in 1902, is little to the taste of the modern reader. Shem'on's narrative is a testament to religious intolerance. Unlike the urbane author of the near-contemporary *History of Rabban Bar 'Idta*, Shem'on was a narrow-minded bigot. His world was one in which miraculous cures could be effected by the application to wounds of a *hnana* (literally, a 'mercy'), a sticky concoction of water, oil and the dust from a holy man's grave. His Nestorian and Jacobite monks believed in sorcery and witchcraft, resorted eagerly to abuse, intimidation and outright violence to root out heresy, and used bribery and influence to court the civil authorities. Worse, they were proud of their intransigence. To the extent that it illustrates the high degree of independence enjoyed by Christians in northern Iraq during and immediately after the Arab conquest, Shem'on's text is of great interest to historians. But in other respects, this unsophisticated account of monkish superstition in the early seventh century must rank as one of the most depressing books ever written in the long history of the Church of the East.

Rabban Hormizd was born in Shiraz in Fars around 560 (hence his name 'the Persian') and died shortly after the Arab conquest, perhaps in 646, at the age of 86. His parents were wealthy Christians and he was given a Christian schooling. At the age of 20 he set out for Egypt, intending to live the life of a solitary monk in the desert of Skete, but was persuaded by three monks of the newly-founded monastery of Bar 'Idta to join them instead. He remained in the monastery of Bar 'Idta for 39 years, and in the nearby monastery of Abba Abraham of Risha for a further six or seven years. In 625 or thereabouts, at the age of 65, Hormizd founded a monastery of his own in the mountains of Beth 'Edrai near Alqosh. As usual, wealthy supporters provided the cash and local villagers the labour. The monastery of Rabban Hormizd, halfway up a mountain, was an impressive engineering challenge, but thanks to the enthusiasm of the locals it was completed in twenty months. Its monks later pretended that the consecration ceremony had been performed by the fictitious patriarch 'Tomarsa II', and forged a deed removing the monastery from the jurisdiction of the metropolitans of Adiabene

and placing it under the patriarch's direct supervision. In fact the patriarchal throne was vacant at the time of the monastery's foundation, and this convenient vacancy suggested attractive possibilities to its monks. It would have been too dangerous to attach the forgery to a genuine patriarch, but the nineteen-year gap between the reigns of Gregory (605–9) and Isho'yahb II (628–45) enabled the plausible-sounding 'Tomarsa II' to be slipped in quite naturally. The forgery was eventually detected. By the thirteenth century the monastery was firmly embedded in the diocese of Beth Nuhadra, and paid the proper share of its revenues to the local bishop and the metropolitan of Mosul.

The monastery lay provocatively in the middle of a belt of Jacobite territory. One of the last administrative acts of the Sasanian governor Ukbe, whose moulting camels had been miraculously restored to health some years earlier by Rabban Bar 'Idta, was to expel the Jacobites from the nearby village of Arsham and hand it over to the Nestorians. The bishop 'Abdisho' of Beth Nuhadra led Hormizd's monks down from the mountain to Arsham, where he consecrated a Nestorian church. The Jacobites fought back. The monastery of Rabban Hormizd was close to the Jacobite monastery of Bezqin ('the fishpond', from the Latin word *piscina*). According to Hormizd's biographer, this monastery was no better than a tavern, and many of its monks were sodomites. Ten Jacobite monks left their fishpond, stealthily entered the Nestorian monastery and beat up Hormizd in his cell, leaving him badly bruised. Although Hormizd recovered from his injuries, the Nestorians believed that the Jacobites had intended to kill him. Soon afterwards the Bezqin monks murdered a prostitute, planted her body outside Hormizd's monastery, and framed the Nestorian superior for this crime before the governor of Balad. Gabriel of Alqosh, a wealthy Christian *shahrij* of an old Persian family, intervened to prevent the governor from exacting summary justice, and Hormizd was later able to prove his innocence before a higher tribunal in Mosul. The guilty Jacobite monks were arrested, but were released after their supporters in Balad and Mosul bribed the local authorities. Not long afterwards the monastery of Bezqin was fortuitously destroyed: by an angel of the Lord, according to Hormizd's biographer, but more probably by Hormizd's vengeful monks. The ruined monastery was then looted by the Nestorians. Hormizd and his followers also made several raids on the Jacobite monastery of Mar Mattai. They were unable to drive out its monks, but they managed to steal a statue from the monastery and to destroy some of its priceless manuscripts.

Monastic Life in the Eighth Century. The events described in the *History of Rabban Hormizd the Persian* took place in the 630s, while the Arab conquest was still in progress. A century later large-scale violence was no longer possible, but right up

to the end of the Umayyad period the civil authorities had only limited control over the rural districts, and bribery was rife. In such conditions, the local Christian elites could sometimes get away with murder. In the village of Beth Qardagh in the Marga district, one Jacobite monk was still perching uncomfortably on top of a limestone column as late as the reign of the patriarch Ya'qob II (753–73). According to the mealy-mouthed account in Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors*, he came to a disastrous end. The Nestorian metropolitan Maran'ammeh of Adiabene confronted the heretic, and in answer to his prayers the stiff-necked Jacobite solitary was consumed by fire from heaven. It seems more likely that Maran'ammeh, who was determined to 'avenge the blood of the righteous Mar Nestorius', ordered his followers to pull down the pillar and lynch its occupant. The Nestorian metropolitan was never brought to book for this crime, as the *shaharija* and *dihqans* turned a blind eye; and there were certainly other occasions when heretics were quietly disposed of in the backwoods, far from the local governor's lawcourt.

Such incidents, of course, were infrequent. Only a few miles away from the scene of this murder, the monks of the Nestorian monastery of Beth 'Abe lived peacefully, prosperously, and on the whole uncontentiously. During the Umayyad period the monastery's monks supplied two Nestorian patriarchs, Isho'yahb III (649–59) and Giwargis I (660–80). Their reigns were a golden age for the monks of Beth 'Abe. Isho'yahb III rebuilt the monastery's church, which was consecrated at a ceremony attended by all the bishops of Adiabene. Giwargis, an enthusiastic patron of literature, showed his respect for the monastery's traditions by presenting it on his return from Beth Qatraye in 676 with a gift of Arabian altar cloths, and entrusting one of its monks, 'Ananisho', with the task of making a redaction of the *Paradise* of Palladius for use in the Nestorian monasteries. In the memories of its monks, however, the most thrilling event in the monastery's history was a scandalous visit by the patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28), retailed in agreeable detail in the *Book of Governors*. During his tour the patriarch was shown an expensive, beautifully-decorated Bible. He immediately took a fancy to this treasure, and ordered it to be stowed in his travel bag. Riding off with the cheerful comment, 'You solitaries have no need of this', he was pursued by a number of monks, hauled off his donkey, beaten up and forced to return the stolen Bible. The monastery's elderly superior Joseph, who had given a lifetime of service to the Church and might reasonably have expected to end his days as a metropolitan bishop, was unable to prevent this outrageous assault on the person and dignity of the patriarch. He dithered unhappily as Sliba-zkha sprawled in the dust, and later tried to excuse the incident as a display of youthful high spirits that had got a little out of hand. The patriarch was not

amused, and the mortified Joseph resigned his office as superior. Among the Nestorians, monastic life was rarely dull.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Notable Authors of the Umayyad Period. During the early years of the Arab conquest, to judge purely by the literature produced at this period, the Church of the East was more interested in its internal concerns than in reacting to the challenge of Islam. The patriarch Isho'yahb II (628–45), who watched helplessly as the Arabs swept through Iraq, seems to have been in deep denial. During these stirring years he is known only to have written a commentary on the Psalms, various letters and homilies, and some essays in monastic history and hagiography. One of his letters, an important discussion on christology, has recently been edited with a French translation by Louis Sako, the present Chaldean archbishop of Kirkuk. Sahdona of Halamun, deposed and excommunicated for heresy first by the patriarch Maremmeh (645–8) and again by his successor Isho'yahb III (649–59), was a noted author, and before he was led astray during his sojourn in Roman territory wrote a number of acclaimed works, including a treatise on the monastic life entitled the *Book of Perfection*. This book has survived in only one manuscript, copied in Edessa in 837 for Saint Catherine's monastery in Sinai. On his return to Persia Sahdona wrote several controversial works. Much of this material is lost, but the surviving texts of Sahdona were published in 1902 by the Chaldean priest Paul Bedjan. One fragment, a heroic attempt to prove that charged terms such as 'person' and 'nature' could be understood flexibly, has survived mainly because it aroused the anger of the future patriarch Isho'yahb III, who submitted Sahdona's arguments to detailed demolition in a series of letters. Sahdona's views were also vigorously assailed by Gabriel of Shahrzur, who became superior of the monastery of Beth 'Abe during the reign of Hnanisho' I (686–98). Gabriel, curiously nicknamed 'the Cow' (*iawretha*), also exploited his local knowledge to write a history of 'the martyrs of Tur Brayn', three Christians from the hill country of Beth Garmai who had been executed in the first years of the great persecution of Shapur II.

Isho'yahb III, who pursued an acrimonious correspondence with Sahdona for many years, was a prolific writer in a range of genres, who is known to have written controversial treatises, funeral orations, hymns and numerous liturgical works. He also wrote a history of Isho'sabran of Erbil, one of the last Persian martyrs. Isho'sabran, a convert from Zoroastrianism, had been put to death by the Sasanian authorities as late as 620. Isho'sabran's martyrdom was still a recent

memory when Ishoʿyahb was writing, and the patriarch's account ensured that it would be remembered for centuries to come. His sufferings were honoured in the diocese of Erbil as late as the eighteenth century, and his name was taken by several metropolitans of Erbil. For the modern reader, Ishoʿyahb comes to life in his letters, of which just over a hundred have survived. Edited and published by Rubens Duval in 1904, they are an important source for the religious history of this period, and are particularly interesting for the light they shed on Ishoʿyahb's attitudes towards the Muslims, towards the Jacobites, and towards his turbulent suffragan Shemʿon of Fars and the faint-hearted Nestorians of Beth Qatraye.

Two other important seventh-century Nestorian writers were Isaac of Nineveh and ʿAnanishoʿ of Beth ʿAbe, both of whom were raised to prominence by the patriarch Giwargis I. Isaac of Nineveh, a native of Beth Qatraye, was discovered by the patriarch during his visit to northern Arabia in 676. Giwargis persuaded him to accompany him back to Iraq, and consecrated him bishop of Nineveh in the great monastery of Beth ʿAbe. After five months, however, Isaac abdicated his episcopacy 'for a reason which God knows', and retired to the mountains of Beth Huzaye to lead a solitary life in the vicinity of other anchorites. In old age he settled in the monastery of Rabban Shabor near Shushter. The date of his death is unknown, and one source says that he became blind towards the end of his life. Isaac was the author of a large number of short works on various aspects of the spiritual life, and is by far the most famous of the monastic writers of the Church of the East. Unlike some of his more otherworldly contemporaries and successors, who were either unable or unwilling to write in an accessible style, Isaac is readable. Perhaps his short stint as bishop of Nineveh had taught him something of the art of communication. He had a winning taste for paradox, and some of his precepts continue to tease the mind long after their first reading: 'If you owe God a farthing, don't think that he can be bought off with a pearl.' His observation, 'The more you grasp for knowledge, the more you will be grasped by pride,' might be read with advantage by scholars everywhere. In the eighth or ninth century Isaac's works found their way to a Nestorian monastic community in Palestine, where they came to the notice of two bilingual monks at the Greek Orthodox monastery of Saint Saba in the Judean desert. These monks translated some of Isaac's writings into Greek, and they are still read today in this Greek translation by the monks of Mount Athos. As he is one of the few authors from the Syriac-speaking Churches to have established a reputation among the Greeks, Isaac is often known simply as 'Isaac the Syrian'.

The patriarch Giwargis I also gave an important commission to the monk ʿAnanishoʿ of Beth ʿAbe, who produced at his request a redaction of the *Paradise*

of the Fathers, an early fifth-century history of the monks of the Scete desert and the Egyptian solitaries and ascetics of the Thebaid composed by the bishop Palladius of Hellenopolis. ‘Ananisho’ was originally a monk of the monastery of Mar Abraham on Mount Izla, and his admiration for Palladius’s masterpiece was kindled by his own travels in Palestine and Egypt. He left the quarrels of the Great Monastery for the monastery of Beth ‘Abe, where he soon gained a reputation for scholarship. Isho’yahb III chose him for the task of stabilising the *hudra*, the Nestorian service-book, and he also wrote a book upon philosophical divisions and definitions, a treatise upon the difficult words which occur in the writings of the Church Fathers, and a work upon the different pronunciation and meaning of words spelled with the same letters. His brother Isho’yahb also achieved eminence, becoming bishop of Shenna d’Beth Ramman. ‘Ananisho’^s redaction of the *Paradise* was far more than a mere translation of Palladius’s original. Its two massive volumes contained six hundred chapters divided into fifteen books, four hundred and thirty chapters upon general matters, and a large number of chapters which he neither numbered nor arranged in any definite order. In the first volume he recounted the histories of ascetics compiled by Palladius and Jerome, and in the second he included the narratives of the fathers and a series of edifying questions and answers on the spiritual life based on his own conversations with the monks of the Scete desert. The *Paradise* must have been known in the Nestorian monasteries long before ‘Ananisho’ undertook to edit, revise and enlarge it, but it was his redaction which, according to Thomas of Marga, ‘was handed down and received in all the monasteries of the East.’

Another important Nestorian writer of the period was Dadisho’ of Qatar, who seems to have flourished during the reign of the patriarch Giwargis I (660–80). Like Gabriel of Qatar and Isaac of Nineveh, he originated from Beth Qatraye. Like Isaac of Nineveh, he spent part of his life as a monk in the monastery of Rabban Shabor. He is also said to have lived for a while in two other obscure monasteries, probably also in Beth Huzaye. He is known to have written several Syriac works on monasticism, including commentaries on the *Paradise of the Fathers* and the *Asceticon* (a collection of twenty-six discourses on the monastic life) of Abba Isaiah, and his own *Discourse on Solitude*, a fascinating study of Nestorian monastic life that has already been mentioned. Little has been preserved of his exposition of the *Paradise of the Fathers*, but his *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* survives in its original Syriac for the first fifteen discourses and in substantial extracts, rearranged thematically in a later Arabic version, for the remaining eleven. Dadisho’^s *Commentary*, a work of considerable erudition, was widely read in the monasteries of the Church of the East, not only in its Syriac and Arabic versions but also (as a number of surviving fragments testify) in Sogdian.

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The literary endeavours of the patriarchs Isho'yahb II and Isho'yahb III have already been mentioned. Two other Nestorian patriarchs during the Umayyad period were also noted writers. The ill-used patriarch Hnanisho^c I (686–98) was the author of a life of his contemporary Sargis Dauda of Dauqarah near Kashkar, and also wrote a number of homilies, sermons and letters. He also wrote a treatise *On the Twofold Use of the School*, in which he argued that the Nestorian schools should be places of moral and religious training as well as of instruction in letters, and a commentary on the *Analytics* of Aristotle. His prescriptions on the role of education in Christian life would be put into effect a century later by the activist patriarch Timothy I (780–823). The scholarly patriarch Aba II (741–51), who had made his name with a commentary on the discourses of Gregory of Nazianzus, was also an Aristotelian. He wrote a commentary on Aristotle's books of dialectics and was the author of a *Book of Military Governors*, perhaps a history of the oppressive Muslim governors of Iraq since the Arab conquest. He composed in verse too, writing a poem on the Persian martyr Zakkai. These works have been lost, and the only texts of Aba II to survive are an aggrieved letter to the clergy of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, who were attempting to remove the city's patriarchal school from his jurisdiction, and a number of exegetical excerpts preserved in the *Garden of Delights* (*gannat bussame*), a liturgical commentary compiled at an unknown date during the Seljuq period.

One of the most important Nestorian writers in the first half of the eighth century was Babai of Gbiltha, a town in the Tirhan district, who flourished in the reign of the patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28). Babai, a prolific writer of hymns, reformed the chaotic way in which they were sung in the Nestorian churches. Before his time, according to Thomas of Marga, different churches used different tunes for the same hymn, so that newcomers to the congregation were at first unable to join in the singing. Babai insisted that all churches used the same tune, and founded a number of schools in the province of Adiabene to teach church music. Two of these schools, one in the village of Bashosh in the Marga district and the other at Kfar 'Uzail near Erbil, were of particularly high quality. Babai's reforms, which Thomas of Marga praised unreservedly, did as much to bind Nestorian Christians together across the caliphate as did the reform and standardisation of the *budra* by the patriarch Isho'yahb III.

Secular and Ecclesiastical History. Several important secular and ecclesiastical histories were written during the Umayyad period, which are lost except for a few citations in later authors. The most important writers in this genre were the seventh-century authors Daniel bar Maryam and Eliya of Merv, whose ecclesiastical histories were used as sources by the author of the ninth-century *Chronicle of Seert*, and the eighth-

century writers Bar Sahde of Kirkuk and Shem'on bar Tabbah of Kashkar, the Christian treasurer of the caliph al-Mansur. Daniel bar Maryam and Bar Sahde of Kirkuk were particularly important, and much of the information furnished by the twelfth-century historian Mari in his invaluable *History of the Eastern Patriarchs* was obtained from these two historians, either directly or through the intermediary of the *Chronicle of Seert*. Bar Sahde of Kirkuk was particularly interested in the turbulent history of Arabia during the sixth century, and the surviving accounts of the massacre of the Christians of Najran at the hands of Yusuf Dhu Nuwas are influenced by his version of events. The metropolitan Eliya of Merv, who was writing in the 660s, was a versatile author who wrote commentaries on several biblical books. His ecclesiastical history was characterised by 'Abdisho' of Nisibis as 'trustworthy'—not a term that can be applied to many Nestorian ventures in this field—and its loss is therefore particularly regrettable. Eliya may well have been the author of the anonymous seventh-century Nestorian history known (after its late-nineteenth-century discoverer Ignazio Guidi) as *Guidi's Chronicle*, which recounts the history of the last years of the Sasanian Empire and the initial stages of the Arab conquest. This detailed chronicle, one of the few Nestorian secular histories to survive from the Umayyad period, hints at the riches that might have been contained in these lost works.

The multiplication of Nestorian monasteries in the hills of northern Mesopotamia just before and after the Arab conquest fuelled the development of one of the most lively Nestorian literary genres, monastic history. As these new foundations bedded in, their monks naturally wished to know more about their mighty founders, and the Umayyad period saw a proliferation of biographies of prominent Nestorian ascetics. The *History of Rabban Bar 'Idta* and the *History of Rabban Hormizd the Persian* have already been mentioned, and several other important monastic histories were written between the seventh and ninth centuries. Most of them have been lost, but their contents can be inferred from the citations made from them by later authors, notably the ninth-century historians Thomas of Marga and Isho'dnah of Basra. Before his disgrace Sahdona wrote an admired biography of Rabban Ya'qob, the founder of the monastery of Beth 'Abe. Rabban Sargis, a native of the village of Beth Rastaq in the Marga district of Adiabene, wrote a history of notable solitaries in the province of Beth Garmai entitled *Destroyer of the Mighty*, a work which won him the name Sargis of Beth Garmai. Yohannan of Beth Garmai, who succeeded Rabban Ya'qob as superior of the monastery of Beth 'Abe, resigned shortly after his elevation and withdrew to the monastery of Mar Ezekiel in Beth Garmai, where he wrote a biography of Rabban Khudahwi of Beth Hale. He was also the author of a lost biography of Rabban Bar 'Idta, which provided the material for the extant *History of Rabban Bar*

‘Idta Sabrisho^c Rustam, a seventh-century monk of the monastery of Beth ‘Abe who later joined the monastery of Beth Qoqa near Erbil, wrote several monastic biographies, including a life of Rabban Sabrisho^c, the founder of Beth Qoqa. He is also credited by Thomas of Marga with writing a life of the patriarch Isho‘yahb III, a prominent patron of the monastery of Beth ‘Abe. Shlemun bar Garaph, a solitary monk of the monastery of Bar Tura who flourished during the reign of Hnanisho^c I (686–98), wrote a general history of Nestorian solitaries. The monk Mar Athqen of the monastery of Mar Abraham, who flourished during the reign of the patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28) and was intriguingly known as ‘the man who pulled out his beard’, wrote a biography of Rabban Joseph of Beth ‘Abe. Most of what little is known of the reign of the Nestorian patriarch Giwargis I (660–80) derives from Athqen’s biography of Rabban Joseph, as his narrative was recycled by Thomas of Marga in his *Book of Governors*. Thomas of Marga mentions several other similar works, mostly written either by or about monks of the monastery of Beth ‘Abe. Some of these monastic histories may well have been as informative, interesting and entertaining as the extant *Histories* of Rabban Bar ‘Idta and Rabban Hormizd the Persian, and their loss is much to be regretted. Although the surviving narratives are rarely entirely free of hagiographical invention, they supply copious details of life in seventh-century Iraq, and open a window directly onto the past in a way which few other literary genres do.

Apologetics and Polemical Literature. Increasing Muslim assertiveness towards the end of the seventh century, coupled with an important Byzantine military victory at Syllaum in 678 which threw the Arabs back from the approaches to Constantinople, provoked a wave of apocalyptic literature among the Christians of the caliphate. The prophet Daniel had said that four kingdoms would rise and fall before the world came to a violent end. Christian writers now struggled to fit the Arabs into Daniel’s schema. In or just before 690 ‘Pseudo-Methodius’, a Jacobite or Melkite Christian from the Shigar district, responded to rumours of an oppressive extension of the poll tax by writing an Apocalypse which predicted that the ‘Ishmaelites’ would soon be destroyed by the Greeks, a scenario that no longer looked quite as fanciful as it once had. Writing at almost exactly the same time, the Nestorian writer Yohannan Penkaye, a native of the town of Fenek near Nisibis, wrote a summary world history (*ktaba d’rish melle*) in fifteen books. The first fourteen books are derivative, and of little interest to modern scholars, but the last book contains an account of events during the decade that followed the death of the caliph Mu‘awiya in 680. Yohannan’s views of the Arab conquest and its aftermath are of great interest. He asserted that the *Tayyaye*, the Arabs, had been sent by God to destroy the sinful kingdom of the Persians, and

perhaps also to punish the laxity shown by the Nestorians in not cracking down more fiercely on the heretical Chalcedonians and Jacobites. 'How otherwise, apart from God's help, could naked men, riding without armour or shield, have been able to triumph?' The Arabs (whose ranks included not a few Christians) had granted complete religious freedom, and all they required was the payment of taxes. Unfortunately, things had gone downhill since the end of Mu'awiya's reign. Political turmoil and plague were ominous signs that the end of the world was at hand. Like 'Pseudo-Methodius', Yohannan prophesied the destruction of the Ishmaelites and the collapse of the kingdom of the Arabs.

Besides encouraging the growth of an apocalyptic literature, the stridency with which the caliph 'Abd al-Malik and his successors asserted the truth of Islam and its superiority to Christianity prompted the emergence of a literature of debate between Muslims and Christians. This genre flowered under the 'Abbasid caliphs, but was born during the Umayyad period. Christian apologists living within the territories of the caliphate were obviously unable to attack Islam in the downright manner characteristic of the polemicists of the Byzantine Empire, but within the limits imposed by tact, prudence and, in some cases, genuine respect for the new religion, Christian writers argued honestly and frankly on behalf of their faith. This literature of debate evolved gradually. At first, with only a limited comprehension of the other side's true position, advocates attacked positions which were not defended and deployed arguments which were ill-suited to impress the audience they were aimed at. As time went on, however, the disputants became better informed, and their arguments can still be read with genuine interest. Indeed, the relevance of these texts is perhaps greater now than it has been for many centuries. The earliest example of this genre, featuring a discussion between the Nestorian monk Abraham of the monastery of Mar 'Abda near Piroz Shabur and a Muslim emir who visited the monastery to receive medical treatment, was set by its unknown author in the third decade of the eighth century, and was probably composed shortly before the end of the Umayyad period. This text, written in Syriac and therefore aimed not at persuading Muslims but at reassuring Christians, ended with a satisfying moral victory for Christianity. When the Muslim emir took his leave, he congratulated the devout Abraham on the pleasure of his conversation, and observed that many men would become Christians if they were not afraid of the consequences of their apostasy from Islam. So, at least, the Christian author would have his readers believe.

The first forays by Nestorian writers against Islam did not distract the Church of the East from its traditional quarrels with pagans and heretics. Nestorian men of letters continued to attack the pagan Zoroastrians, even after the Arab conquest had deprived them of their power to persecute, and they disputed as zestfully

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as ever with the heretical Chalcedonians and the Jacobites. Isho'yahb III wrote a treatise 'against the heretics' (probably the Jacobites), Bar Sahde of Kirkuk a treatise denouncing the Zoroastrians, and Shem'on bar Tabbaha a treatise against the Chalcedonians. Sabrisho' Rustam, a monk of the monastery of Beth 'Abe who flourished during the reign of Isho'yahb III (649–59), was the author of a long, elegantly-written work against 'the heretics', in which he also took a swipe at other lost souls who espoused 'obscure beliefs'. This book must have won him a considerable following in Nestorian monastic circles, as he was later poached by the monks of the monastery of Beth Qoqa near Erbil. Shahdost, bishop of Tirhan, a contemporary of the patriarch Aba II (741–51), wrote a long work on the reasons for the separation of the Western and Eastern Churches, which must have been a polemical rather than a historical treatment of this touchy subject.

Ascetic Literature. Although the surviving works of monastic history indicate that Nestorian monks could be just as ill-tempered and quarrelsome as their secular neighbours, the ascetic ideal was still honoured, in theory if not always in practice; and the Umayyad period was something of a golden age for ascetic literature. The works of several seventh- and eighth-century ascetic writers have survived, either in full or in excerpts which have been preserved in later collections. The monastic historian Yohannan of Beth Garmai is also known to have written rules for novices and a collection of ascetic maxims. Shem'on the Graceful (fl.680), a monk of the monastery of Rabban Shabor near Shushter, wrote an *Explanation of the Mysteries of the Monastic Cell*. Shem'on was a doctor as well as a monk, and had doubtless acquired his professional knowledge from the Christian medical schools of Jundishapur. Yohannan Zaroqa ('the Blue'), the Nestorian bishop of Hirta during the last decade of the seventh century and most of the first half of the eighth century, wrote a *Book of Exhortation* for monks, and also purveyed his advice in hundreds of letters, most of them now lost. Writing at the beginning of the fourteenth century, 'Abdisho' of Nisibis mentioned that 280 of his letters had been collected, but few of them have survived to the present day. Yohannan of Dailam (fl.750), a native of the town of Hdatta on the Tigris who was abducted by raiders from pagan Dailam and taken home by them, wrote eight or nine ascetic treatises, none of which have survived. Since there had been a Nestorian diocese for the Dailam region only a century earlier, he would have found some Christian company in his forced exile on the shores of the Caspian Sea. His work was evidently read in the Nestorian monasteries of Mesopotamia, as several monasteries were later named after him, not only in northern Iraq but also in remote Ubullah in the southern province of Maishan. A generation after his death the Nestorian

controversialist Abu Nuh al-Anbari, the secretary of the patriarch Timothy I (780–823), turned aside from his attacks on the Muslims and the Jacobites to write his biography.

Two of the most notable of the ascetic writers were Joseph Hazzaya and John of Dalyatha. The works of Joseph Hazzaya (fl.720), who wrote extensively on mystical and ascetic subjects, were condemned for their Messallian tendencies at a synod held by the patriarch Timothy I in 790. Since Joseph seems to have believed that he was the privileged recipient of divine revelations (hence his nickname Hazzaya, 'the seer'), his condemnation is not entirely surprising, though some modern scholars are inclined to defend his orthodoxy. John of Dalyatha (fl.770), who lived as a solitary in the mountains of Beth Nuhadra for most of his life, retired reluctantly into a monastery in his old age. He reformed the monastery's rules for novices and wrote a series of treatises on the monastic life and an elevated series of letters on the glory and beauty of God. These texts were written for the edification of otherworldly monks, and offer little comfort to ordinary Christians anxious for guidance in their daily lives. Indeed, as John of Dalyatha did his best to avoid all contact with his fellow human beings and is not known to have visited any of the towns of northern Iraq, he may never have met a Muslim in his life, and may not even have heard the Muslim call to prayer. Shortly after his death his works were also proscribed for their Messallian sympathies at the synod of 790, though he was later rehabilitated by Timothy's successor Isho^c bar Nun. A prophet without honour in his own country, his works have survived primarily because they were read widely by Jacobite ascetics. They were also translated into Ge'ez, inspiring generations of monks in Ethiopia.

Chapter Four
THE AGE OF TIMOTHY I
(780–905)

OVERVIEW

By the middle of the eighth century it had become clear to the most sanguine Christian who lived within the territories of the caliphate that there was no longer any realistic hope that the Arabs would be supplanted, either by the Byzantines or any other force. It was no longer possible, as it had been under the Umayyads, to ignore Islam and pray for better times. Christians were now forced to come to terms with the reality of their situation and to formulate appropriate responses. Many Christians left the caliphate and resettled in Byzantine territory. Those who chose to remain under Muslim rule began to group together to preserve their Christian identity. There was a gradual exodus of Nestorian Christians from southern Mesopotamia and Fars, where the Muslims were now a majority of the population, to the towns and villages of northern Mesopotamia, where Christians could still be found in substantial numbers. Many Christians simply abandoned their faith and converted to Islam. Analysis of tax records suggests that the second half of the eighth century and the first half of the ninth century saw a decisive shift of religion in the territories under Arab rule. Before 850, Muslims were still a minority, accounting on average for less than 20 percent of the population. After 950, they were in a majority, accounting for more than 60 percent.

There were many reasons for the rapid advance of Islam during this period, besides its attractiveness as a religion, though this obviously counted. Whereas the Umayyad caliphs had been more interested in taxing the Christians than in converting them, the ‘Abbasids, in a calmer and more prosperous age, wanted to spread Islam. Christians were now subjected to pressure to convert. In high society, such pressure was normally applied politely. An educated Muslim would write a courteous letter to a Christian friend, demonstrating the intellectual attractions of Islam and also pointing out the practical advantages of becoming a Muslim. Lower down the social scale, however, Christians were frankly made to feel their inferiority. Like the Jews in medieval Europe, the Christians of the caliphate were subjected to dress laws and other restrictions which publicly marked them as a

tolerated species. They were also hit in their pockets. The poll tax (*jizyah*) which they had to pay was far more onerous than the charitable contribution (*zakat*) levied on Muslims. Finally, they were under intense social pressure to conform to the prejudices of their Muslim neighbours. Faced with this kind of financial and social pressure, it is hardly surprising that some Christians simply gave up the struggle to maintain their faith, and went over to Islam.

Christian leaders did their best to rally the faithful by asserting the superiority of Christianity to Islam and checking attempts at accommodation. Some Christians tried to avoid unpleasantness by referring to Jesus as 'son of Mary', as the Muslims did. These fainthearts were rebuked by a ninth-century Palestinian Christian writer. They would have done better to have called their Saviour 'Lord of the Worlds' (*rabb al-'alamin*), he said, citing one of the most resonant Islamic titles for God. Other Christians rather liked the Islamic stress on monotheism. In their eyes, the Muslims were merely restating in different terms a truth that had already been revealed in the Old Testament, and they had no qualms about using the Islamic formula 'There is no God but God'. The Nestorian patriarch Timothy I (780–823) had no truck with such defeatist sentiments, which undermined the Christian belief in a Trinity. In one of his letters he referred rudely to the Muslims as 'the new Jews'. The ninth century therefore saw the emergence of a vigorous Christian apologetic literature. Nestorian, Jacobite and Melkite writers alike defended their faith against Muslim assaults. Such spirited counterattacks kept up morale, and helped to mask the slow decline in the fortunes of the Christian Churches under Muslim rule.

The number of Christians in the caliphate peaked at the end of the Umayyad period, and during the early 'Abbasid period the Christian Churches of the caliphate began their long, unspectacular decline into insignificance. Yet strangely enough, the ninth century is popularly viewed as a 'golden age' for the Nestorian Church. It is sometimes asserted that the Church of the East reached the height of its power during the reign of Timothy I (780–823), generally considered to be the most able Nestorian patriarch of the 'Abbasid period. In fact, it was considerably weaker in Timothy's day than it had been under Isho'yahb III a century earlier. Certainly, it was probably wealthier than it had ever been, as evidenced by the flagrant corruption of most of its patriarchs and metropolitans. Nestorian Christian doctors had the ear of the caliphs, and were occasionally able to sway their policy. Nestorian writers played an important part in a bold scholarly endeavour to translate Greek technical texts into Syriac and Arabic. The Nestorian patriarchs were also accorded a slightly higher status by the Muslim authorities than their Jacobite and Melkite counterparts. But beyond Baghdad, the picture was rather different. It is clear from a study of the ninth-

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century Nestorian dioceses that the Church of the East was losing ground in Maishan, Beth Huzaye, Beth Garmai and Fars. Beyond its heartland, in the eastern mission field, Nestorian missions to Dailam, China and Tibet ended in failure. Understandably, many scholars have been more interested in discussing the exciting intellectual opportunities open to Christians in 'Abbasid Baghdad than in analysing the quiet decline of Christianity in the provinces. For this, Timothy himself is partly to blame.

Shrewd, intelligent and unburdened by scruples, Timothy I skilfully negotiated his way through the perils of high office in 'Abbasid Baghdad. He lived through the unnerving reigns of al-Mahdi (775–85) and al-Rashid (786–808), during which life in the caliphate was often made miserable for Christians, and survived into a somewhat calmer period under the scholarly caliph al-Ma'mun (813–33), holding office for the exceptional term of forty-three years. Timothy worked ceaselessly for the greater good of the Church of the East throughout his reign, and although his methods were often deplorable he never lost sight of that goal. He removed rivals who stood in his way and made whatever compromises were necessary with the Muslim rulers to win himself the freedom of action he needed to achieve his aims. He was an energetic if not always effective administrator, who took a personal interest in the Church's missionary role. He was also responsible for crafting an image of the Church of the East that has persisted to this day. In Timothy's reign, as romantics have imagined it, groups of humble Nestorian monks trudged along the roads to China and Tibet, each carrying a Bible in his knapsack, to preach Christianity to the heathen; while back in the glittering capital of the 'Abbasid caliphs their urbane patriarch engaged a Muslim commander of the faithful in a spirited theological debate on the respective merits of Christianity and Islam. These images were shaped by Timothy himself, and his great achievement was to persuade posterity that the Church of the East in the ninth century counted for far more than it did in reality. Timothy was a very successful illusionist.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Reign of Timothy I (780–823). Timothy's remarkable talents were first put to use during the patriarchal election of 780 after the death of Hnanisho^c II. Timothy was then bishop of Beth Bgash, an unfashionable rural diocese in the metropolitan province of Adiabene, and his chances of success must have seemed slim, as it was rare for a suffragan bishop to make the leap up to patriarch. However, his abilities had already won him the confidence of Abu Musa ibn Mus'ab, the Muslim governor of Mosul, and his Christian secretary Abu Nuh al-Anbari. Both men

thought so highly of him that they exempted him from the normal tax on the revenues of his diocese. With their support, Timothy set about the sordid process of winning the patriarchal election. One of his rivals was the elderly Ishoʿyahb, the superior of the monastery of Beth ʿAbe, and Timothy first frightened him by warning him that he was not fit enough to survive the intrigues of high office, and then bought him off by promising to consecrate him metropolitan of Adiabene. Giwargis, the erudite linguist who had been defeated by Hnanishoʿ II seven years previously, was also nominated at a synod convened by the bishop Thomas of Kashkar in the monastery of Mar Pethion in Baghdad. He enjoyed the support of the court physician ʿIsa bar Quraysh, and might have been a serious threat to Timothy had he not died suddenly in mysterious circumstances. His death was suspiciously well-timed, but as not even Bar Hebraeus suggested that it was anything other than fortuitous, Timothy can perhaps be acquitted of his murder. Having shaken off two potential rivals by fair means or foul, Timothy entered the election as the clear favourite. He secured a majority in the ballot by promising to reward his supporters with the contents of a number of artfully displayed sacks, apparently full of gold. He was duly elected, and it was then found that the sacks contained only stones. To those who expressed their indignation, Timothy blandly replied, 'The priesthood is not sold for money.'

These tactics were not forgiven by Timothy's opponents, and the metropolitans Ephrem of Elam and Joseph of Merv, supported by the pugnacious bishop Shlemun of Hdatta, formed a party to depose Timothy and appoint Ephrem of Elam in his stead. The opposition bishops held a synod in the monastery of Beth Hale, in which they excommunicated Timothy and replaced Ishoʿyahb as metropolitan of Adiabene with the bishop Rustam of Hnitha. Timothy retorted by excommunicating Joseph of Merv, who appealed unsuccessfully to the caliph al-Mahdi. After failing to win redress Joseph converted to Islam, the better to avenge himself on Timothy at a later date. Meanwhile Ephrem gathered his bishops in Baghdad, and again excommunicated Timothy. Timothy responded in kind, and the two factions took their dispute onto the streets of Baghdad. Several Christians were killed in the ensuing rioting, and others were thrown into prison by the long-suffering Muslim authorities. This threat to the public peace eventually forced ʿIsa bar Quraysh to intervene and bring the two Nestorian factions to terms. Timothy's election as patriarch was confirmed, and he was consecrated in May 780. As senior metropolitan, Ephrem of Elam was obliged to perform the consecration ceremony, and sulked disgracefully throughout the proceedings.

The passions aroused by Timothy's disputed election continued to run high, and shortly after his consecration he became embroiled in a crisis which he was lucky to survive. Joseph of Merv proved to be an implacable enemy, who did

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his best to have the new patriarch executed for treason. The caliphate was at war with the Byzantine Empire at the time, and Joseph told the caliph al-Mahdi that the Nestorians always prayed for a Greek victory. The court physician 'Isa bar Quraysh retorted in alarm that this was simply not true. In fact, he said, the Greeks hated the Nestorians even more than they hated the Jews. The caliph soon confirmed the truth of 'Isa's assertion. A high-ranking Greek officer, who had been captured during a recent campaign and was languishing in prison in Baghdad, was brought to him and asked what he thought of the Nestorians. The Greek replied that they could not really be considered Christians at all, and that Nestorian merchants travelling in Byzantine territory were not allowed to worship in Greek churches. 'To tell the truth,' he said, 'they are closer to the Arabs than to us.' This frank answer persuaded al-Mahdi that 'Isa was right, and he took no further action. Undeterred, Joseph tried again. This time he forged a letter from Timothy to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI, urging the Greeks to keep up their military pressure on the Arabs and promising them victory if they took the offensive. He then arranged to plant the letter on Timothy, and bribed one of the caliph's eunuchs to 'discover' this incriminating evidence. Bar Hebraeus, who told this story, unfortunately omitted its ending. He mentioned that the plot failed, by the grace of God, but did not explain why. Perhaps the eunuch simply lost his nerve, or refused to bear false witness. Whatever the truth of the matter, Joseph of Merv was ruined socially by this second failure. He had already burned his boats with the Christians, and had now ruined his credit with the Muslims too. Al-Mahdi had at first welcomed such an illustrious convert to Islam, but his trust had been egregiously betrayed. He was not the forgiving type, and Joseph left the caliphate in disgrace and went into ignominious exile in the Byzantine Empire.

Timothy was now able to run the Church of the East as he wanted, and he innovated energetically. Ever since Bar Sawma's time, Nestorian bishops, priests and monks had been allowed to marry. This practice, instituted by the patriarch Acacius at the end of the fifth century to deflect one of the main Zoroastrian prejudices against the Christian clergy, had rather lost its point since the Arab conquest. Timothy brought the Church of the East into line with the rest of the Christian world by requiring bishops and monks to remain celibate. Priests and deacons, however, were still allowed to marry. Timothy was also a champion of religious education. Although the famous School of Nisibis had rapidly declined during the Umayyad period after it became clear that the Jacobites were no longer an existential threat to the Church of the East, the Nestorians still made a point of building schools wherever they could. Timothy himself had been educated at a fine village school not far from 'Aqra, in the heart of the rural diocese of Marga, and he knew from personal experience how such institutions helped to

inculcate orthodoxy and keep heresy at bay. 'Take care of the schools with all your heart,' he advised a newly-consecrated bishop. 'Never forget that the school is the mother and nurse of the church's children.'

Timothy took a keen personal interest in ecclesiastical administration, and is probably best remembered for his efforts to strengthen the missionary role of the Church of the East. He created a two-tier system of metropolitan provinces, distinguishing sharply between the 'interior' provinces of Mesopotamia and the 'exterior' provinces of the mission field. This major reform gave the metropolitans of the exterior provinces more authority in certain areas, but they were henceforth excluded from the patriarchal elections. Timothy also created several new metropolitan provinces. He moved the metropolitan seat of the province of Adiabene from Erbil to Mosul and created new metropolitan provinces for Damascus, for Dailam and Gilan on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, for Rai, for Sarbaz in eastern Segestan, and possibly also for Tibet. He detached the diocese of Armenia (Akhlat) from the province of Nisibis and the diocese of India from the province of Fars, and raised them both to metropolitan status. He also made sure that the existing provinces in the mission field were kept supplied with bishops. He is known, for example, to have consecrated a metropolitan for remote China, and another for Samarkand. No doubt, like any Christian patriarch, he was anxious to preach the gospel to the pagans, and his work in Azerbaijan and Central Asia was certainly motivated by missionary concern. But he was also determined to resist the Jacobites, and his creation of a new metropolitan province for eastern Segestan was specifically directed against Jacobite infiltration. Timothy's activism was most impressive, but few of his new metropolitan provinces lasted for more than a generation or two. The provinces of Damascus, Rai and India stayed the course, but none of the other provinces survived into the Seljuq period.

The greatest obstacle to Timothy's reform of the metropolitan system was the intransigence of the metropolitans of Fars. Ever since the synod of Isaac in 410 the Persian bishops had only grudgingly admitted the claims of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. They could not do entirely without the patriarch, as only he had the authority to consecrate a metropolitan for the province, but they asserted their independence from the effete Syrians of Mesopotamia in every way they could. They had defied Isho'yahb III just over a century earlier, and it had taken a personal visit from the patriarch Giwargis I to restore a measure of harmony. According to Bar Hebraeus, the bishops of Fars at the beginning of Timothy's reign were still wearing white robes, eating meat and marrying, three bad habits that Timothy was determined to stamp out. They had also ostentatiously promoted the use of Persian among the Christian communities of Fars, northern Arabia and India, sometimes alongside but often instead of Syriac. 'We are the disciples

of the apostle 'Thomas', they boasted, 'and have nothing in common with the throne of Mari.' The collapse of Christianity in northern Arabia during the first centuries of Muslim rule showed the bishops of Fars the writing on the wall. It was a time for Christians to show solidarity, and they were at last prepared to sacrifice some of their independence if the conditions were right. The recent removal of the seat of the patriarch from Seleucia-Ctesiphon to Baghdad marked an important break with the past that also helped to create the climate for a lasting settlement. Timothy seized his opportunity. He consecrated a new metropolitan for Fars, Shem'on, and instructed him not to wear white, not to eat meat and not to marry. At the same time, he exempted the bishops of Fars from the requirement that they should be 'perfected' by the patriarch shortly after their consecration. Since this requirement had been at the heart of the dispute that had dominated the patriarchate of Isho'yahb III, this was an important concession. The episcopal succession in the province of Fars now lay in the hands of Timothy's nominee Shem'on. Whenever a diocese fell vacant, he appointed a bishop prepared to follow his own example of 'best practice', thereby bringing Fars into conformity with the Mesopotamian provinces within a generation or two. Bar Hebraeus presented these transactions as a bilateral agreement between Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Rev Ardashir, but it is more likely that it formed part of Timothy's more general programme for the reform of the metropolitan system. Persuading the refractory bishops of Fars to bow to his authority was perhaps the greatest achievement of Timothy's reign. He crowned his triumph by definitively removing the Indian dioceses from the jurisdiction of the metropolitans of Fars and reconstituting India as a separate metropolitan province. From now on, the Church in India would function in Syriac. There would be no more provocative crosses with Pahlavi inscriptions.

Timothy lived through the reigns of five caliphs, all of whom he knew personally. He was held in high esteem by al-Mahdi and al-Rashid, who admired his statesmanship and his learning. He once obliged al-Rashid, who was being pressured by Muslim lawyers to divorce his wife Zubaidah, by suggesting that she nominally converted to Christianity and then immediately converted back to Islam. This neat, if unprincipled, solution allowed al-Rashid to evade the strict Muslim rules on divorce and remarriage and won Timothy Zubaidah's gratitude. He also amused the caliph with his diplomatic answer to a difficult question. Al-Rashid asked him which was the true religion in the sight of God, Islam or Christianity. Timothy suavely replied, 'The religion whose rules and teachings best bear witness to God's purpose.' But Timothy's good personal relations with the caliphs were only of limited use when, for one reason or another, they decided to crack down on the Christians. In the 780s, after suffering an embarrassing

defeat at the hands of the Byzantines, al-Mahdi ordered a brief persecution of Christians in the caliphate. According to the Christian chroniclers, al-Mahdi's enforcers brutally flogged Christian women to force them to convert to Islam, administering up to a thousand lashes to some of the victims. Al-Rashid did not order a general persecution, even though the war with Byzantium continued into his reign, but he was prone to impulsive outbursts, and issued several vicious edicts against the caliphate's Christian minority. On one occasion he was told that the Nestorians worshipped the bones of the dead in their churches, and promptly ordered several churches to be destroyed, including those in Basra and Uballah. He later realised that he had been misled, and allowed the Christians to rebuild them. He also ordered a number of Jacobite churches in Syria and Palestine to be destroyed after hearing that some monks at Aleppo had abused the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch. Many of the caliphate's Christians wearied of al-Rashid's cat-and-mouse tactics, and resettled in Byzantine territory where they did not have to live under the constant threat of oppression. In 1922, in his magnificent drama *Hassan*, James Elroy Flecker depicted al-Rashid as a cruel and capricious tyrant. Predictably, his unflattering portrait has been dismissed by some modern scholars as hopelessly Orientalist. But if al-Rashid was not noticeably cruel by the standards of his time, he was certainly capricious. Flecker did not pluck the material for his portrait out of thin air.

The Ninth-Century Nestorian Patriarchs. Timothy died in 823 at the age of 95 and was buried in the monastery of Klilisho^c, which he had founded as a permanent patriarchal residence in Baghdad. He was succeeded by Isho^c bar Nun (823–8), an elderly, hot-tempered and embittered monk of the monastery of Mar Eliya near Mosul. Isho^c, a native of the Mosul plain village of Beth Gabbare, had conceived an intense dislike for Timothy in his youth, when both men had studied together at the same rural school in Marga. He later entered the monastery of Mar Abraham the Mede near the Mosul village of Batnaya, and after Timothy became patriarch he wrote a number of books denouncing him, which were widely circulated. Not long after Timothy's consecration he quarrelled with his fellow monks and withdrew to Baghdad for a short period, after which he entered the monastery of Mar Eliya, where he remained for the last thirty years of Timothy's reign. After Timothy's death he was elected patriarch without opposition in July 823, thanks to the support of Gabriel bar Bokhtisho^c, the influential Christian doctor of the caliph al-Ma'mun (813–33). Shortly after taking office he attempted to remove Timothy's name from the diptychs. The proposal met with fierce opposition, and its chief detractor wrote to Gabriel defending the validity of Timothy's ordinations and praising him for governing the Church for forty-two years 'according to the

rule of Diodorus, Theodore and Nestorius'. Gabriel intervened, and persuaded the patriarch to abandon the proposal. After a reign of only four years Isho^c bar Nun fell ill. During his illness he thought better of his treatment of Timothy, and ordered a disciple to burn the books in which he had attacked him.

Isho^c bar Nun died on 1 April 828, and was succeeded in June of the same year by Giwargis II (828–31), the elderly metropolitan of Elam. In earlier life Giwargis had been a monk of the monastery of Beth 'Abe, and eventually rose to become its superior. He once approached the court physician Gabriel bar Bokhtisho^c and asked him to intervene to divide equally an estate which had been seized from him. Gabriel 'recognised his fairness' and persuaded the patriarch Timothy to consecrate him metropolitan of Elam, a post which he held for twenty years. He is said to have favoured the priests and the scholars in his province and built them a school. He was successful in the patriarchal election which followed the death of Isho^c bar Nun due to Gabriel's support, though Mari commented that he was unsuitable for the patriarchal office, being already a hundred years old and suffering from sciatica at the time of his election, 'so that he needed the support of his stick or of two men whenever he wished to walk'. He died in March 831 after a short and uneventful reign.

Giwargis was succeeded by another elderly patriarch, Sabrisho^c II (831–5), who reigned little longer than his predecessor. Sabrisho^c, a native of Beth Nuhadra, was metropolitan of Damascus at the time of his election and had earlier been bishop of Raqqa. He is said to have owed his election to the favour of the caliph al-Ma'mun, whom he entertained in magnificent style during a visit by the commander of the faithful to Damascus. According to Mari, Sabrisho^c was a proficient student of ecclesiastical history, but 'not otherwise gifted'. Yet on Mari's own showing, Sabrisho^c did not altogether deserve this dismissive appraisal. He cared greatly for education and its uses. During his short reign he lived in the monastery of Mar Pethion in the western quarter of Baghdad, a Sasanian foundation which he restored. He built a school there, placed it in the care of talented teachers, and used its revenues to subsidise the studies of monks at the nearby monastery of Sirsir, enabling them to learn Arabic in addition to Syriac and Greek. Al-Ma'mun, the founder of the celebrated 'House of Wisdom' (*bayt al-hikmah*) in Baghdad, was a generous patron of learning, and there would soon be lucrative careers in the translation business for Christian monks who were trilingual. Living frugally himself, Sabrisho^c also used the revenues from a number of villages in the patriarchal province for the upkeep of his school, and for building churches and guesthouses. Far from being a dull plodder, Sabrisho^c seems to have made wise use of the resources at his disposal to ensure that, when their services were needed later in the ninth century, there were enough

Nestorian scholars available to dominate the work of translating classical Greek literature into Arabic through the medium of Syriac. If so, he was a remarkably far-sighted patriarch.

Sabrisho^c II was succeeded by Abraham II (837–50), bishop of Hdatta and formerly superior of the monastery of Beth ʿAbe. His election was opposed by the Nestorians of Beth Huzaye, who favoured the claims of their metropolitan Aba. Aba, who also enjoyed the backing of the caliph al-Muʿtasim's Christian doctor Bokhtisho^c, was duly elected and proceeded to Seleucia-Ctesiphon for his enthronement. But Abraham refused to accept defeat. He too had friends at court, and with the support of the physician Salmawayh ibn Banan and his brother Ibrahim, al-Muʿtasim's treasurer, set about reversing this decision. Salmawayh complained to al-Muʿtasim that the Christians 'did not pay me the respect due to a close friend of your majesty and an official who has grown old in your service', and insisted that Aba's election had been intended as a personal slight. The caliph reacted predictably. On al-Muʿtasim's orders, the governor of Baghdad arrested Aba and imprisoned him in chains. Aba prudently withdrew his candidacy, and Abraham was appointed patriarch in his stead. The Church of the East remained divided for several years after his accession, and Abraham was only generally accepted after Aba's death.

Abraham was remembered by later generations as 'pure and chaste, but incapable of governing the Church'. He appointed several close relatives to key administrative positions, and they took advantage of their offices to enrich themselves. Abraham, it was believed, did nothing to stop them. Thomas of Marga, who was one of Abraham's confidential secretaries, published his *Book of Governors* shortly before the patriarch's death. Abraham was a great friend of the bishop Eliya of Muqan, who had been appointed to the mission field of Dailam by Timothy I; and while Thomas quoted freely from Abraham's reminiscences for his portrait of Eliya and several other distinguished monks of the monastery of Beth ʿAbe, he drew a discreet veil over the patriarch's lax administration. Most of Abraham's thirteen-year reign passed in relative peace and quiet, but his final year was marked by a crackdown on the Christians by the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–61). In May 850 al-Mutawakkil was persuaded by his courtiers that too many Christians enjoyed positions of influence, and gave them a sharp reminder of their inferior status by knocking down a number of churches. According to Bar Hebraeus, 'during Abraham's time the Christians were in sore straits, as the Arabs demolished several churches in Basra'. Clearly this was not a general persecution, and al-Mutawakkil was probably merely enforcing the seldom-used law against the construction of new churches. The Muslim authorities often turned a blind eye when a new church was built, as this enabled them to extract money from its

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congregation at a later date by threatening to tear it down. It therefore suited local governors for the law to be kept on the books as a weapon, but not actually to be enforced. Al-Mutawakkil's zeal for Islam on this occasion may well have been regretted by his subordinates in Basra, who missed a chance of lining their pockets. As for the Christians, they lost their churches but saved their money. Perhaps some of them were thankful for small mercies, though the language used by Bar Hebraeus suggests otherwise. If so, the Christians were right to be distressed. Al-Mutawakkil's splenetic outburst was a worrying sign of things to come.

Abraham II died in November 850, and in early 851 the bishops assembled to elect his successor. The recently-appointed metropolitan Theodosius of Elam pressed his own claims for the office, but he had made himself so unpopular in his province that many bishops doubted his fitness, and he was forced to withdraw his candidacy. The opponents of Theodosius soon wondered whether they had been too hasty. Three other candidates were put forward in swift succession, but each was suddenly struck down either by illness or death. Yohannan, metropolitan of Damascus, was the first to be elected patriarch, but before his enthronement he suffered a stroke while conducting a church service, which left him paralysed. He was removed to a monastery, where he lingered for four more years, constantly repeating the words 'You are just, O Lord, and just are your judgements'. Mikha'il, bishop of Hormizd Ardashir, succeeded him, but died of illness very shortly afterwards. The choice next, according to Mari, fell on a certain bishop named Abraham, but a delegation sent to inform him of his preferment found that he too had just died. By now the continued vacancy in the office of patriarch could only be ascribed either to the most remarkable of coincidences or to divine displeasure. Accordingly, when Ibrahim ibn Nuh, one of the caliph's secretaries, proposed Isho'dad of Merv, bishop of Hdatta, as a fourth candidate, the physician Bokhtisho^c successfully persuaded al-Mutawakkil to reconsider the claims of Theodosius, who was finally elected and consecrated in 853.

Bokhtisho^c's triumph was shortlived. Both he and the newly-consecrated patriarch Theodosius were denounced to the caliph by Ibrahim and his supporters only weeks later. Bokhtisho^c was disgraced and banished from the capital (he died in exile in Bahrain in 870), and Theodosius was thrown into prison. The charge against the Nestorian patriarch was that he had been conducting a treasonable correspondence with the Roman emperor. A similar accusation had been levelled against the patriarch Timothy I two generations earlier. The charge was almost certainly untrue, but the Arab caliphs were no less sensitive than the Sasanian kings had been to signs of disaffection among their Christian subjects. Theodosius was given the opportunity to swear to his innocence on oath, and his refusal to do so appeared incriminating in Muslim eyes. The patriarch was soon joined in

prison by his brother Thomas, metropolitan of Beth Garmai, and both men were sustained during an imprisonment of three and a half years by gifts of food from the faithful. Eventually they were freed. One of the caliph's favourites, a Christian doctor named Yohannan ibn Masawayh, died in 858, and al-Mutawakkil released Theodosius and summoned a host of priests and deacons to his capital Samarra so that his funeral could be conducted by the Nestorian patriarch with becoming pomp and ceremony. The funeral ceremony went off so well that the grateful caliph allowed Theodosius to return to Baghdad shortly afterwards to reoccupy the empty patriarchal cell. Theodosius did not survive his release for long, however, and died in 859.

In 854, while Theodosius was still languishing in prison, al-Mutawakkil launched a further attack on the Christians. Once again, he strictly enforced a battery of repressive laws that in normal times were rarely applied by the Muslim authorities. Christians were commanded to wear distinctive garments, 'with a patch on their shirts,' were forbidden to ride on horseback, and were forbidden to go to the markets on Fridays. The graves of their dead were to be destroyed, their children were not to attend the Muslim schools or be taught Arabic, and a wooden image of Satan was to be nailed to the door of every Christian's house. A number of churches were demolished in Samarra, and the venerable monastery of Dorqoni near Seleucia-Ctesiphon was pillaged. Most modern scholars prefer not to describe such periodic outbreaks of Muslim spite against the caliphate's Christian minority as persecutions, because the authorities did not round up Christians and order them to deny their faith. But while no Christians are known to have been tortured or killed for their faith during al-Mutawakkil's crackdown, they were nevertheless systematically terrorised, and were left in no doubt that they lived under Muslim rule on sufferance. The degree of severity with which the anti-Christian laws were applied depended on the personality of individual Muslim governors. While some governors destroyed the churches in their districts, others preferred to spare them in return for a substantial bribe from the Christians under their protection. All the same, these demoralising and humiliating measures were almost as damaging as a formal persecution. In the event, this particular crackdown lasted for only four years, and was halted by the capricious al-Mutawakkil when he released Theodosius from prison in 858.

The next Nestorian patriarch, Sargis (860–72), was the caliph's personal choice. Rather than be taken in again by the advice of unreliable courtiers, al-Mutawakkil decided to appoint a bishop whom he knew and liked. His choice fell on the metropolitan Sargis of Nisibis. The two men had met some years earlier, when al-Mutawakkil was passing through Nisibis during a journey to Damascus. Sargis had seized his opportunity, and offered the caliph and his retinue hospitality on a

lavish scale. The good impression he had made on that occasion now served him in good stead. In token of the harm which it had suffered at the hands of Bar Sawma in the fifth century and Yohannan the Leper in the seventh, a tradition had developed in the Nestorian Church that no metropolitan of Nisibis should be elected patriarch. This ancient tradition was now broken at the caliph's insistence, and Sargis was installed as Theodosius's successor. In the event he turned out to be an able patriarch and a good administrator. Instead of closeting himself in the patriarchal monastery of Klilisho^c, he lived instead in Samarra, which had temporarily replaced Baghdad as the capital of the 'Abbasid caliphate. Here he was at the centre of events, and could administer the Church far more effectively than from Baghdad. According to Mari, 'the condition of the Church improved' during his twelve-year reign, and this was doubtless due to his personal oversight.

Shortly after the death of Sargis in 872 two candidates were put forward as possible successors: Enosh, metropolitan of Mosul and Erbil, and Israel, bishop of Kashkar. Enosh was initially the favourite, but Israel took advantage of his position as 'guardian of the throne' to advance his own claims. The election campaign bitterly divided the Nestorians of Baghdad. According to Bar Hebraeus, if two Christians met in the street, one would ask the other 'Are you for Enosh or for Israel?' and punched or kicked the other man if he got the wrong answer. According to Mari, 'the people inveighed boldly against the nobles, and each candidate asked the friends of the sultan to support his own bid.' Support for Israel quickly grew, but Enosh was supported by the emir of Baghdad, who ordered Israel to withdraw his candidature. Israel failed to comply quickly enough, and a fanatical supporter of Enosh assaulted him during a church service, dragging him down from the *bema* and cutting off his testicles. Israel died of this wound forty days later. The violent squabbles which followed his death delayed the appointment of a successor to Sargis for nearly five years.

Enosh was finally elected patriarch in January 877, after seeing off a second rival, the bishop Yohannan bar Narsai of Anbar, with the support of certain 'royal physicians'. In 878 a Nestorian monk named Habib, possibly a scribe in the Palace of Wisdom, made a sensational 'discovery': a treaty, nearly two hundred and fifty years old, written in Arabic on a yellowing oxhide, between the prophet Muhammad and the Christians of Najran. This treaty, which bore the very seal of the Messenger of God, promised the Christians all kinds of benefits: freedom of worship, exemption from military service, and privileges for monks and women. Needless to say, the 'treaty' was a forgery. The liberty it promised under Muslim rule was not what the Christians of Najran had actually obtained back in the seventh century, but what later Christians wished they had. The 'treaty' may have taken in the Muslims for a while, as it was quoted in full by the unknown author

of the *Chronicle of Seert*, probably a contemporary of Enosh, who shamelessly vouched for its authenticity.

Enosh died in May 884 and was succeeded by Yohannan II bar Narsai (884–92), bishop of Anbar, who enjoyed the support of two influential Christian notables, Salama ibn Saʿid and ʿAbdon ibn Mahlad. The forms of an election were preserved, but care was taken to ensure that Yohannan's name was chosen when the lots were drawn. In 885 the monastery of Klilisho^c, which had been the residence and sepulchre of the Nestorian patriarchs since the days of Timothy I, was attacked and pillaged by a Muslim mob. The motive for the attack has been disputed. According to Eliya of Nisibis, it was triggered by Muslim resentment of the arrogance of some wealthy Christians. Some of these gentry, it was said, ostentatiously rode on horseback through the streets of Baghdad in defiance of the sumptuary laws, which reserved this privilege for Muslims. According to Bar Hebraeus, the attack was prompted by the patriarch's refusal to continue paying protection money to a Muslim shaikh who owned a mosque close to the patriarchal residence. The offended shaikh arranged for a Muslim funeral to be disrupted by a stone-throwing hooligan and for the disruption to be blamed on the patriarch and his monks. There might be elements of truth in both these stories. At all events, the patriarchal residence was looted of its valuables, and by the time the city's police restored order it had lost most of its wooden fittings too. The looters also broke open the coffin of the recently-buried patriarch Enosh, cut off the head of the corpse, stuck it on the point of a lance and paraded it through the streets of Baghdad. Over time, through the intercession at court of ʿAbdon ibn Mahlad, whose Muslim brother Saʿad was the caliph's vizier, the monastery of Klilisho^c was restored to something approaching its former glory, but Yohannan II never lived there again. For the next five years he withdrew to the town of Wasit, and when he returned to Baghdad towards the end of his reign he chose a new residence, the church of Asbagh al-ʿIbadi in the predominantly Christian al-Shammasiya quarter on the eastern bank of the Tigris. This church, the property of Baghdad's 'devotees' from Hirta, was obviously a large and imposing building, as Timothy I and several of his successors had been consecrated there. The church had never before been used for patriarchal burials, but Yohannan was buried there after his death in 892.

Yohannan II was succeeded by Yohannan III (893–9), a nephew of the patriarch Theodosius who had been appointed metropolitan of Mosul and Erbil during the reign of Enosh. His candidacy was opposed by another Yohannan, bishop of Radhan, and he would probably have lost the election had he not made the most of a fleeting opportunity to display his profound scholarship. Invited to preach a sermon on the Sunday of Pentecost, he impressed both his

fellow-bishops and the ordinary Christians of Baghdad by reciting word for word a sermon of Gregory of Nazianzus on the Holy Spirit, 'neither adding to it nor subtracting from it'. This remarkable display of rote learning won the day, and he was elected patriarch without a dissenting vote. His erudition is perhaps explained by his habit, which he continued as patriarch, of working from dawn to midday, eating and sleeping until sunset, and reading works of theology from dusk to dawn. Unfortunately, he was not so successful with men as he was with books. According to Bar Hebraeus he was tall and handsome, but given to gluttony and too fond of money. On the day of his election he offered the archdiocese of Mosul, which he would soon be vacating, to the bishop Yohannan of Hnitha, a scion of the influential Bokhtisho^c family which provided so many of the 'Abbasid caliphs' personal physicians. It was understood that the patriarch would be suitably reimbursed for his generosity, but Yohannan refused to pay him the sum agreed. 'Trusting in his cunning and his power, he went back on his word, and refused to give the catholicus a single penny.' Yohannan III did his best to cajole him into handing over at least some of the money he was owed, but without success. No doubt the other bishops, in an age in which simony was commonplace, relished the story. The moral was clear: the patriarch's power only ran so far, and it was best not to tangle with the Bokhtisho^c family. Yohannan died of a stroke in 899, six years after taking office. Both in life and in death he set a new fashion. During his patriarchate he bought the 'Greek Palace' (*Darta d'Romaye, Dar al-Rum*), a handsome building in the al-Shammasiya quarter close to the church of Asbagh. He used the Greek Palace as his residence, and his body was buried there. His successors also chose to live and die there, and the Greek Palace became the residence and sepulchre of the Nestorian patriarchs for the next two and a half centuries.

The Reign of Yohannan IV (900–5). Yohannan III was succeeded by Yohannan bar 'Isa, bishop of Radhan, who had been passed over in the patriarchal election of 893. As so often, the election was contested, and Yohannan was opposed by the metropolitan Theodore of Elam. Yohannan's election in 900, after a two-year vacancy, was declared valid by the metropolitan Joseph of Merv, and the result was accepted by Theodore and many of his supporters. This did not satisfy the metropolitan Yohannan bar Bokhtisho^c of Mosul and Erbil, who angrily declared that the election had been fixed. Yohannan, who regularly delighted and scandalised the faithful with his ostentatious displays of luxury (it was his custom to tour the dioceses of Mosul on horseback, with an imposing escort of silk-clad Greek and Nubian servants and a train of camels and mules to carry his cooking pots and wardrobe), evidently believed that he had an excellent chance of winning

a fresh election if he stood as a compromise candidate. Once again, the Bokhtisho^c family was throwing its weight about. The affair was referred to the caliph al-Muʿtadid, who instructed the ‘grand eunuch’ Badr to sort it out. Yohannan bar Bokhtisho^c had taken the precaution of cancelling a large medical bill owed him by the caliph, so al-Muʿtadid told the eunuch to give the post to the metropolitan of Mosul if he could do so without being too obvious. The ill-tempered meeting between Badr and the warring Nestorian factions was described by Bar Hebraeus in one of the more enjoyable passages in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Bar Hebraeus took the basic material for this passage from Mari, but subtly reshaped it to make fun of his rivals. In his portrayal, the Nestorians are incapable of conducting a civilised debate or formulating a rational argument:

When they arrived Badr said to them, ‘His majesty orders you to banish anger and rancour from your midst, and to tell me the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.’ Then one of the bishops replied, saying, ‘May the commander of the faithful live for ever! It is his to command, and we are merely his most humble servants. If he decrees that a certain man shall be advanced, who shall object? But if he leaves the election to us, and allows us to conduct it according to our law, then he should know that we have chosen Yohannan bar ʿIsa to be our catholicus, because we believe he is worthy of the office. As for that metropolitan of Mosul who will stop at nothing to seize the leadership for himself, we did not choose him, nor will we willingly accept him.’ Badr turned to Yohannan bar Bokhtisho^c. ‘What do you say to that?’ Yohannan said, ‘It is our Christian law that all the bishops should meet together and elect a catholicus. This one was chosen only by those two fellows there, so we cannot accept him. In any case, he is not up to the job.’ Then the doctor David bar Dailam rounded on him angrily and said, ‘The election belongs to us, the people of Baghdad. It is our right to choose whom we wish. The bishops are merely the icing on the cake.’ After a bitter wrangle Badr tried to persuade them to accept Yohannan bar Bokhtisho^c. But his opponents replied, ‘We will never accept as the head of our Church a man who shows off his hunting dogs and monkeys!’ Badr answered that he had only adopted this lifestyle when he was first summoned to court, and was hardly likely to go back to such vanities. Finally, his adversaries were backed into a corner. ‘We said right from the start that he was unsuitable; and since we belong to a race that does not like to wash its dirty linen in public, we did not

want to tell you everything. But you now force us to reveal that he is a bastard, the son of his father's concubine, and so unworthy of any office whatsoever in the Church. True, the last two catholici honoured him, but only because of threats and intimidation.' Seeing that they would not agree, Badr said to Yohannan bar Bokhtisho^c, 'It is beneath your dignity to compete for a prize that is beyond your grasp. Even if they had begged you to accept, you would have done better to show your magnanimity by refusing. As it is, since they do not want you, all the more reason for you to refuse.' The caliph issued a decree that the bishops should be free to choose whomever they wished as their leader, and in consequence Yohannan bar 'Isa was consecrated at Seleucia.

The Jacobite maphrian's portrayal of the disputants may well have been influenced by scenes that he himself had witnessed at the court of the il-khans in late thirteenth-century Persia; and although this memorable portrait of the leaders of the Nestorian Church under the 'Abbasid caliphs is unquestionably malicious, it is none the less convincing for that. It is only fair to add that, judging from many of the other stories Bar Hebraeus told in his *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, Jacobite bishops would doubtless have behaved just as badly in the same situation.

Yohannan IV was a man of unbending rectitude, who recognised the strength of the temptations to which many of his predecessors had succumbed. At his consecration he published a Syriac manifesto, in which he promised to govern the Church according to the precepts of the Gospel and the apostolic canons; to maintain the faith of Diodorus, Theodore and Nestorius; to take no bribes for ordaining bishops and priests and making judicial decisions; to preserve his chastity; to extort no money from his congregations; to spend the revenues of the patriarchate on charitable works; and to appoint only worthy men to the priesthood. Yohannan made no secret of his belief that many of his predecessors had failed to meet even these modest standards. He also made it clear that he had drawn up this list of patriarchal duties not on his own account, but in order to keep his successors honest. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to infuse a little of his own high-mindedness into his metropolitans and bishops. He died in 905, after serving as patriarch for only five years.

According to the twelfth-century historian Mari, Yohannan IV was an admirable patriarch, who lived up to the promises he had made at his consecration. However, his reign was remembered chiefly for a *cause célèbre* which exposed the Nestorians to ridicule from both the Muslims and the other Christian Churches of the caliphate. Not long after he became patriarch Yohannan excommunicated

Theodore, the newly-consecrated metropolitan of Beth Garmai, for living in sin with a Muslim flute-girl. An illegitimate daughter had been born from this union, and many pious churchmen were shocked that Theodore had acknowledged her and was looking after both mother and child. Theodore enjoyed important connections among the Christian nobility of Baghdad and had been widely tipped to become the next patriarch, so it is unlikely that Yohannan moved against him lightly. He first warned him to amend his behaviour, and only issued a bull of excommunication when his warnings were ignored. He may not have foreseen the consequences of driving Theodore out of the Church. Some years later the outcast metropolitan converted to Islam and married his Muslim mistress, to the delight of the Muslims and the scandal of the Christians. The Nestorians did their best to play down this embarrassing defection. Theodore died in middle age shortly after his conversion, allowing them to claim that he had spent his final months racked with guilt. He had been seen one day in a Nestorian church in Baghdad, they said, sighing and weeping over the betrayal of his faith. Needless to say, such stories were waved aside by the Muslims and the Jacobites. Whatever the truth of the matter, Theodore might not have embraced Islam if Nestorian canon law had not enjoined celibacy on its bishops. Renouncing his prospects of becoming the patriarch of the Church of the East, Theodore became a Muslim so that he could marry the woman he loved.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

The Limited Influence of the Church of the East. In 1850, in the first volume of his classic *History of the Holy Eastern Church*, John Mason Neale asserted that the Nestorian Church at the height of its power under the ‘Abbasids was as influential as the Roman papacy. ‘It may be doubted’, he wrote, ‘whether Innocent III possessed more spiritual power than the patriarch in the city of the caliphs.’ Although sensibly qualified in 1937 by Aubrey Vine, who pointed out that mere geographical extent was not a reliable indicator of power, this magnificently wrong-headed judgement continues to resonate to this day.

Too many writers have been dazzled by the fact that, at various points in its history, the Church of the East maintained a couple of dozen dioceses in Central Asia, India and China alongside the 70 or 80 dioceses it possessed in Iraq and Persia. Some scholars have estimated that there were as many as twenty-seven metropolitan provinces and 230 dioceses. Both figures need to be reduced by about half. The number of metropolitan provinces was exaggerated by medieval historians who were incapable of distinguishing between doublets and who listed

The Martyred Church

functioning provinces alongside lapsed provinces, and the number of dioceses was inflated for the same reasons. The number of Nestorian dioceses probably reached a peak at the beginning of the tenth century. In 893, according to the historian Eliya of Damascus, the Church of the East had around 80 dioceses, most of which were in Mesopotamia and Persia. Eliya was clearly working from good information, and if there were several dioceses in Central Asia and India that he was not aware of, the total number of Nestorian dioceses is unlikely to have exceeded a hundred. To put this figure into perspective, the Roman province of Africa, roughly coextensive with modern Tunisia, had around 130 dioceses on the eve of the Arab conquest. The Roman Empire as a whole had well over a thousand dioceses. Under the 'Abbasid caliphs the Church of the East had slightly fewer dioceses than the Syrian Orthodox Church, its despised neighbour, and almost as little real power.

By the same token, it is sometimes asserted that the Church of the East numbered 'tens of millions' of believers during the 'Abbasid period. This is an unrealistic notion. In 1913, on the eve of the First World War, the Nestorian and Chaldean population of northern Mesopotamia numbered just under a quarter of a million. Although there were doubtless more Nestorian Christians living in the provinces of Nisibis and Mosul a millennium earlier, it is unlikely that their numbers exceeded a million. It is also doubtful if the Christian population in each of the other metropolitan provinces of the Church of the East exceeded 100,000, and in many provinces it was probably very much lower. Based on the known locations of villages and monasteries and on frequent references to Christian migration within Iraq and Iran during the past twelve centuries, there were probably only around 400,000 Nestorian Christians in the province of Nisibis, 600,000 in the province of Mosul, 300,000 in Beth Aramaye, Maishan, Beth Garmai and the other Mesopotamian provinces, half a million in Iran, Central Asia and China, and perhaps 200,000 in India. There were perhaps another 100,000 Nestorian Christians in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Cilicia, and another 50,000 in the Arabian outposts of Najran and Soqatra. The total Nestorian Christian population at the beginning of the tenth century may have been just over 2 million.

The Patriarch and the Metropolitans. There was eager competition for the position of patriarch, as it brought its holder considerable wealth and patronage. Most patriarchal elections during the 'Abbasid period were vigorously contested, and the contenders nearly always bribed shamelessly to square the powerful Christian officials at the court of the caliph and to sway the votes of the metropolitans of the electoral college. Victory normally went to the candidate who won the support of the caliph's intimates, and the most the metropolitans could do if they

did not like the prospective victor was to register their displeasure by boycotting the election. Such tactics might delay an unpopular patriarch's consecration for a few months, but did not change the outcome. Most patriarchs, having incurred enormous debts to get elected, recouped their losses by taking bribes for the appointment of metropolitans. Simony, the selling of ecclesiastical posts, was so commonplace that the twelfth-century historian Mari singled out for praise the very few patriarchs who remained honest. There was a going rate for such transactions, and Mari roundly criticised the patriarch Abraham III (906–37), who auctioned the archdiocese of Nisibis three times in a row to the highest bidder, as 'going beyond the usual rate in selling the priesthood for money'. The metropolitans, in their turn, sold on the dioceses of their province. Patriarch, metropolitans and bishops all made money from the contributions of the faithful. At least in Mesopotamia, there was no such thing as a poor bishop, and some of the Nestorian patriarchs and metropolitans flaunted their wealth scandalously. The flamboyant metropolitan Yohannan bar Bokhtisho^c of Mosul was the prime example, but he was not the only offender.

The patriarchs occasionally held synods, attended by the Mesopotamian metropolitans, whose decisions became the basis of the canon law of the Church. Judging from the surviving corpus of Nestorian canon law, these synods normally dealt with mundane matters of church discipline. Most patriarchs were not interested in administration, though there were occasional bouts of unfocused activism. There was little planning for the long-term interests of the Church. Dioceses were often allowed to lapse on the death of their bishops, particularly in the mission field, and it normally took a delegation from the bereaved diocesans to prod the patriarch into action. In theory, the patriarch could overrule his bishops, provided he covered himself by consulting first, but in practice attempts to intervene in a particular diocese tended to provoke the entertaining 'dissensions' that feature so largely in Mari's narrative. The Church of the East has never been known for its good discipline.

During the 'Abbasid period the Nestorian Church had around fifteen ecclesiastical provinces, each of which was headed by a metropolitan. In theory, the patriarch chose each metropolitan. In practice, particularly in refractory provinces such as Fars, there were often cases where a metropolitan was nominated by the local Christians and the patriarch had either to consent to his nomination or risk a damaging confrontation. Writing in the fourteenth century, the historian 'Amr claimed that each metropolitan had between six and twelve bishops under him. This was a loose and misleading generalisation. Judging from the lists of Eliya of Damascus, it certainly applied to the larger Mesopotamian provinces and to Fars, but few of the other provinces contained more than three or four

suffragan dioceses. Rai, for example, had only one suffragan diocese (Gurgan), while Barda'a had none at all. Bishops were discouraged from marrying, though marriage was permitted for priests and deacons. Most bishops therefore tended to be monks, though some ambitious priests remained celibate in the hope of eventual preferment. The bishops of the exterior provinces were supported in some cases by chorepiscopi, 'country bishops' of a lower rank, but it is not altogether clear how they functioned. In China, they seem to have had higher status than elsewhere.

The creation of a clutch of new metropolitan provinces by the patriarch Timothy I prompted an overdue reform of the metropolitan system. At the synod of Joseph in 554 it had been agreed that all metropolitans should be eligible to vote in a patriarchal election. Timothy's own irregular election, which had relied on the votes of the metropolitans of Damascus and Merv, had discredited this principle, and at a synod held in 790 he created two classes of metropolitan province; the provinces of 'the interior', which from then on would form the electoral college, and the provinces of 'the exterior', which were given greater autonomy than the interior provinces to compensate them for losing their vote. The provinces of the interior comprised the five traditional Mesopotamian provinces (Elam, Nisibis, Maishan, Adiabene and Beth Garmai) and neighbouring Hulwan. Fars, Merv and Herat became exterior provinces, as did all the other provinces created since 554. Henceforth, the metropolitans 'of the exterior' were allowed to consecrate suffragan bishops without reference to the patriarch. The patriarch Theodosius (853–8) took these reforms a step further. The metropolitans of the 'interior provinces' were obliged to attend the election of a patriarch, and were also required to report in person to the patriarch every four years. The metropolitans of the ten 'exterior' provinces (Fars, Merv, Herat, Rai, Armenia, Barda'a, Samarqand, India, China and Damascus) were merely required to submit a written report from their province every six years.

These reforms simplified the administration of the metropolitan system, and were doubtless also intended to invigorate the Nestorian Church in the exterior provinces. But however justifiable on practical grounds, the new system sealed the triumph of the Syrian element in the Church of the East by placing the office of the patriarch firmly under its control. Henceforth the Nestorian episcopate was dominated by Syrians, and the exterior provinces were run as Syrian colonies. Greeks, Armenians, Persians, Turks, Mongols, Tibetans, Chinese and Indians attended church services conducted in Syriac. Their priest may have been trained locally, but their bishop, if they ever saw him, was nearly always a Syrian. The failure of the Church of the East to root these Churches more firmly in native soil was one of the main reasons why their ultimate collapse in the fourteenth

century was so complete. The congregations of the exterior provinces were isolated Christian outposts in pagan lands and, in an age where most priests had only a limited education, needed the intelligent and vigorous leadership which only a bishop could provide for their very survival. It is for this reason that the medieval histories of the Church of the East so often mention the arrival in Mesopotamia of delegations from the exterior provinces who came to plead for a bishop to be sent out to them. The centralised system chosen by the Church of the East worked only so long as a bishop could travel safely from Mesopotamia to the exterior provinces. If the roads were cut, disaster followed.

The Mesopotamian Provinces. Any discussion of the diocesan organisation of the Church of the East under the early 'Abbasid caliphs must start with the list of Nestorian dioceses compiled in 893 in Arabic by the metropolitan Eliya ibn 'Ubaid of Damascus. This list is of enormous value, though it occasionally contains mistakes and omissions, particularly in the case of the province of Beth Garmai. According to Eliya, the Church of the East was organised at this period into a province of the patriarch and fourteen metropolitan provinces. These 'eparchies', as Eliya called them, included the six provinces of the interior (Elam, Nisibis, Maishan, Mosul, Beth Garmai and Hulwan); seven provinces in Persia and Central Asia (Fars, Merv, Herat, Rai, Armenia, Barda'a and Samarqand); and Eliya's own western province of Damascus. Eliya's list did not include the remote provinces of India (Beth Hindaye) and China (Beth Sinaye), perhaps from inadvertence or possibly because at the time of writing the Church of the East was not sending metropolitans to either province.

Eliya listed thirteen dioceses in the province of the patriarch. Eleven of these dioceses, although their names are given in Arabic rather than in the familiar Syriac forms of the synodical records, can be readily identified with the dioceses of Kashkar, Tirhan, Zabe, Hirta, Piroz Shabur, Shenna d'Beth Ramman, Beth Daraye, Nahargur, Beth Waziq, Qasr and Nahrawan, and Radhan, attested during the Sasanian and Umayyad periods. Piroz Shabur ('Shapur is victorious') had by now been renamed Anbar by the Arabs, and the diocese of Zabe was sometimes called Nu'maniya, after the important town of that name midway between Baghdad and Kashkar. Nahargur (or as Eliya called it, 'Abdasi) was in the province of Maishan during the Sasanian period, and it is not known when, or why, it was transferred to the province of the patriarch. The Nahargur region was known as Jukha by the Arabs (in Syriac, Gawkai), and it is likely that two ninth-century bishops of Gawkai, a diocese not otherwise attested, were in fact bishops of Nahargur. The other two dioceses—'Ukbara and Nifr—are not attested before the ninth century. 'Ukbara, midway between Baghdad and Samarra, probably became a diocese

during the reign of the caliph al-Mu'tasim (833–42), who honoured the city with his residence. The diocese of Nifr, named for the ancient Sumerian city of Nippur, around 80 kilometres south of Baghdad, was probably also founded in the ninth century, though an Umayyad date is not impossible. The earliest-known bishops of 'Ukbara and Nifr were Hakima of 'Ukbara, consecrated by the patriarch Sargis around 870, and Hnanisho^c of Nifr, present at the consecration of the patriarch Yohannan IV in 900. By the end of the tenth century the title of the bishops of Nifr also included the name of the nearby town of Nil. Syriac sources for the 'Abbasid period occasionally mention the dioceses of Meskene and Beth Daron, both apparently in the province of the patriarch, and there are good grounds for identifying these two dioceses with 'Ukbara and Radhan respectively.

The metropolitan province of Beth Huzaye (or Elam, as it was now normally called in Arabic) had six dioceses at the end of the Umayyad period: the metropolitan diocese of Beth Lapat, now normally known as Jundishapur, and the suffragan dioceses of Karka d'Ledan, Hormizd Ardashir, Shushter, Susa and Ispahan. The lapse of the diocese of Ram Hormizd shortly after the Arab conquest was the first indication of decline, and further decline was evident in the 'Abbasid period. By the end of the ninth century, according to Eliya of Damascus, the diocese of Karka d'Ledan had been absorbed into the diocese of Susa. The dioceses of Shushter, Hormizd Ardashir, Susa and Ispahan seem to have persisted uneventfully into the Seljuq period, though few of their bishops are known. The city of Hormizd Ardashir was eclipsed after the Arab conquest by the nearby Arab foundation at Ahwaz, and the diocese of Hormizd Ardashir was renamed accordingly. By the middle of the ninth century Ahwaz was the most important town in Beth Huzaye, and in 848 the future patriarch Theodosius (853–8), then metropolitan of Elam, tried to transfer his metropolitan throne from Jundishapur to Ahwaz. The Nestorians of Jundishapur protested indignantly, and he was forced to abandon the idea. It has been suggested that the town of Shahpur Khwast (modern Khurramabad) in Elam was also the seat of a Nestorian bishop during the 'Abbasid period, as the fourteenth-century Nestorian author 'Abdisho^c of Nisibis included in his list of Syrian authors the bishop Gabriel of 'Shapur', who perhaps flourished during the ninth or tenth century. However, it is most unlikely that new dioceses were being created in Elam at this period, and 'Abdisho^c was almost certainly referring to another diocese, possibly Jundishapur or Piroz Shabur in the province of the patriarch.

Eliya of Damascus listed only three suffragan dioceses in the province of Nisibis at the end of the ninth century: Arzun, Beth Zabdai and Balad. It is certainly true that these three dioceses were flourishing at this period, as their bishops are frequently mentioned in the literary sources. However, Eliya seems to

have been unduly pessimistic in his appreciation, as there is persuasive evidence that two other suffragan dioceses attested during the Umayyad period, Qardu and Shigar, also persisted uneventfully into the Seljuq period. The bishop Theodore of Qardu, for example, was appointed metropolitan of Elam in 893 by the patriarch Yohannan III. A diocese of Qube d'Arzun, perhaps centred on the village of Kib near Seert, was created shortly before 745 by the metropolitan Cyprian of Nisibis during the course of a dispute with the patriarch Aba II (741–51), but probably only lasted for the lifetime of a single bishop. The creation of the diocese was condemned as uncanonical and the bishop Gabriel of Qube d'Arzun, who was present at a synod held by Timothy I in 790, was probably its first and last incumbent. The diocese of Akhlāt was removed from the jurisdiction of the metropolitans of Nisibis by Timothy I, who created a new metropolitan province for Armenia, duly noted by Eliya of Damascus in 893. It is most unlikely that the metropolitan province of Armenia survived into the Seljuq period, and by the middle of the eleventh century, if not considerably earlier, Akhlāt was again a suffragan diocese of Nisibis.

The province of Maishan, on the face of it, continued much as normal, but it is doubtful whether there were many Christians left after two and a half centuries of Muslim rule. At some time during the ʿAbbasid period the metropolitans of Maishan abandoned the old city of Prath d'Maishan and fixed their seat in the new town of Basra. The three suffragan dioceses attested in 410 (Karka d'Maishan, Rima and Nahargur) apparently still existed, though when Eliya of Damascus was writing Nahargur had been transferred to the province of the patriarch. However, although the literary sources for this period mention several of the province's metropolitans, few of the names of their suffragan bishops have survived. Karka d'Maishan and Rima (now more often known under their Arabic names of Dastumisan and Nahr al-Dayr) may by now have been little more than 'rotten boroughs'. Nevertheless, Basra and Ubullah certainly had Christian communities towards the end of the eighth century, as the caliph al-Rashid destroyed their churches at one point in his reign, and the patriarch Timothy I (780–823) also had to write to them to settle a christological dispute. The metropolitan Hnanisho^c of Sarbaz, en route to his province in remote Segestan at about the same period, provoked Muslim riots when he donned his metropolitan robes to enter Basra and Ubullah. He had doubtless decided to wear them to impress the Christians in both cities.

In the metropolitan province of Adiabene, special arrangements were made by Timothy I to reflect the growing importance of the city of Mosul. The province of Adiabene, with its metropolitan see at Erbil, included the region of Athor, the home of the ancient Assyrians, and since the sixth century this region had

been included in the suffragan diocese of Nineveh. During the Umayyad period the town of Mosul on the eastern bank of the Tigris, founded by the Sasanians under the name Nud Ardashir, became an important city and eventually eclipsed Erbil itself. At the same time, the diocese of Nineveh had been reduced to a shadow of its former self by Jacobite expansion in the villages of the Mosul plain. Timothy decided to suppress the diocese of Nineveh and move the seat of the metropolitans of Adiabene from Erbil to Mosul. Henceforth, the metropolitans of Adiabene were tactfully styled metropolitans 'of Mosul and Erbil'. As far as the Christians of the Erbil region were concerned, their metropolitan continued to hold the time-honoured titles of bishop of Erbil and Hazza and metropolitan of Adiabene. For the Christians of Mosul, however, he was the metropolitan of Assyria (Athor), or of Mosul and Nineveh.

The metropolitan province of Mosul and Erbil was credited with six suffragan dioceses at the end of the ninth century: Beth Nuhadra, Beth Bgash, Beth Dasen, Hdatta, Nineveh and the mysterious 'al-Badia'. Eliya of Damascus was right to include the first four dioceses in his list but wrong to include Nineveh, which had lapsed almost a century earlier. He also omitted to mention five other dioceses, Marga, Hebton, Salakh, Adarbaigan and Taimana, which certainly flourished during the 'Abbasid period and were just as certainly suffragan dioceses of the province of Mosul. The diocese of Adarbaigan, mentioned as a suffragan diocese of Mosul in the eighth century by Thomas of Marga, was centred on the town of Ganzak during the Sasanian period, around a hundred and twenty miles to the east of Erbil. The metropolitan Maran'ammeh of Adiabene, who flourished during the reign of Ya'qob II (754–73), adjusted the boundaries of the dioceses of Salakh and Adarbaigan, transferring the district of Daibur from Salakh to Adarbaigan and the district of Inner Salakh from Adarbaigan to Salakh. As the diocese of Salakh included the districts around and to the east of the modern town of Rawanduz, these boundary adjustments probably involved Nestorian communities living in the upper valley of the Lesser Zab. By the end of the eighth century there was also a diocese for Taimana, the district across the Tigris from Mosul which included the important monasteries of Mar Mikha'il and Mar Eliya. The first known bishop of Taimana, Mushe, was present at the synod of Timothy I in 790, and it is tempting to ascribe the foundation of the diocese to this activist patriarch, who had several other interventions in the province of Adiabene to his credit. The diocese of Hnitha was in abeyance for much of the 'Abbasid period, as Timothy joined it to the diocese of Hebton shortly after his consecration in order to punish the bishop Rustam of Hnitha, who had opposed his election. Several bishops of Hebton are known from the ninth and tenth centuries, but

none of Hnitha. The union was not permanent, however, and by the eleventh century Hebton and Hnitha were again separate dioceses.

The metropolitan province of Beth Garmai supposedly had five suffragan dioceses at the end of the ninth century: Shahrard, Daquqa, Beth Waziq, Darabad and 'Khanijar and Lashom'. Eliya's source seems to have misled him here, as this list is contradicted by other, better evidence. Eliya omitted to mention the dioceses of Hrbath Glal and Shahrzur, which certainly persisted into the eleventh century, unless the otherwise-unknown 'Darabad' is an alias for one of these dioceses. He was also wrong to include Beth Waziq in his list, as it was in the province of the patriarch at this period; and again wrong to distinguish between the dioceses of Daquqa and Lashom, as Mari insisted on more than one occasion that Daquqa was simply an alternative name for Lashom. In contrast to the impression of stability given by Eliya, the available evidence suggests that Christianity began to decline in Beth Garmai in the 'Abbasid period and that the ecclesiastical province began to shed its dioceses. In the first half of the ninth century the metropolitan seat was moved from Karka d'Beth Slokh to Daquqa, where it would remain for the next five centuries. This move entailed the suppression of the archdiocese of Karka d'Beth Slokh. Two of the province's traditional suffragan dioceses, Lashom and Tahal, are last mentioned in 900, when their bishops were present at the consecration of the patriarch Yohannan IV. (Tahal was listed as a diocese of Beth Garmai in a diocesan list compiled at the beginning of the eleventh century, but such lists were innately conservative and were often generations out of date.) According to Mari, the patriarch Yohannan III (893–9) was earlier bishop of the town of Khanijar in Beth Garmai. Khanijar was linked to Lashom by the end of the ninth century in Eliya's list, but seems earlier to have been dependent on the diocese of Shahrzur. It was never a separate diocese, although it is sometimes claimed as one. At the end of the 'Abbasid period, therefore, Beth Garmai had only four dioceses: the metropolitan diocese of Daquqa (Lashom), which had replaced Karka d'Beth Slokh, and the suffragan dioceses of Shahrard, Hrbath Glal and Shahrzur.

The Exterior Provinces. By the 'Abbasid period the metropolitan province of Fars had lost most if not all of its northern Arabian dioceses, and this setback was almost certainly the decisive factor in the willingness of the bishops of Fars to recognise the authority of the patriarch Timothy I in the 780s. Nevertheless, despite growing Muslim influence in the province, the diocesan structure in Fars itself persisted with little change. The metropolitans of Fars still sat at Rev Ardashir, and Eliya of Damascus listed the suffragan sees of Fars, in order of seniority, as Shiraz, Istakhr, Bih Shapur, Kirman, Darabgird, Siraf, 'Marmadith'

and Soqotra. Eliya's list provides evidence of both continuity and change. The thriving coastal port of Siraf had evidently replaced Gur as the seat of the Nestorian bishops of Ardashir Khurra, and it is interesting to discover that all four of the mainland dioceses attested in the Sasanian period were still flourishing two and a half centuries after the Arab conquest. No other source mentions that Kirman and Shiraz had Nestorian bishops in the ninth century, but there is no need to doubt Eliya's veracity. Both cities are very plausible locations for Nestorian dioceses. Kirman was an important Christian centre during the Sasanian period, while Shiraz was the birthplace of the seventh-century monk Rabban Hormizd the Persian. Shiraz, a modest town which had grown rapidly after the Arab conquest and eventually replaced Rev Ardashir as the capital of Fars, owed its prominent position in Eliya's list to its status as the provincial capital. Soqotra, whose Nestorian community and its bishop were mentioned by Cosmas Indicopleustes as early as the sixth century, once again appears as a diocese. Eliya's mysterious 'Marmadith' cannot confidently be localised, but may well have been a scribal error for the northern Arabian diocese of Mashmahig. Although it is more likely that the diocese of Mashmahig lapsed in the Umayyad period, along with the other dioceses of Beth Qatrave, it is not impossible that it persisted into the 'Abbasid period. Despite the decline of Christianity in the Arabian peninsula, Nestorian communities with bishops could still be found in one or two locations. Thomas of Marga mentioned that Yemen and Sana'a had a bishop named Peter during the reign of the catholicus Abraham II (837–50), who had earlier served in China. The diocese of Yemen is not mentioned again, but the nearby diocese of Najran seems to have persisted into the Seljuq period.

According to Eliya of Damascus, the metropolitan province of Hulwan had suffragan dioceses for Hamadan, Nihawand, Dinawar and 'al-Kuj' in 893. It is not clear whether the dioceses of Nihawand and Dinawar were established in the Umayyad or 'Abbasid period, as only two of their bishops are recorded, from the late eighth and early eleventh century respectively. The bishop Sabrisho^c of Nihawand was among the signatories of the acts of the synod of Timothy I in 790, and the bishop Mari of Dinawar was consecrated metropolitan of Hulwan in the early years of the eleventh century. The diocese of 'al-Kuj' cannot be convincingly localised, but has been tentatively identified with Karaj d'Abu Dulaf. None of its bishops are known. Hulwan and its suffragan dioceses are scarcely mentioned in the Nestorian ecclesiastical histories for this period, and it is likely that Christianity was declining in Media, as it was in neighbouring Elam.

The diocese of Rai (Beth Raziqaye), several of whose bishops are attested during the Sasanian period, was detached from the province of Hulwan in 790 by Timothy I and raised to metropolitan status, in recognition of the growing

importance of the city of Rai under the ʿAbbasid caliphs. Timothy perhaps also wanted to link up the provinces of Hulwan and Merv by creating a province for central Iran. In one of his letters, written during the reign of the caliph al-Mahdi (774–85), Timothy mentioned the recent death of the bishop Theodosius of Rai, and his intention to replace him with a metropolitan bishop. The earliest-known metropolitan of Rai, Habiba, is attested in 804, and the names of two later ninth-century metropolitans have also been preserved. Rai was duly listed as a metropolitan province in 893 by Eliya of Damascus. The province's full title was 'Rai, Qum and Qashan', and its jurisdiction must have included Tabaristan and a number of Nestorian communities further to the south. Interestingly, it had only one suffragan diocese, for the Sasanian foundation of Gurgan, so its metropolitans must have relied on country bishops and periodeuts to administer their extensive territories. The Nestorian bishops of Gurgan were also kept busy, as by the tenth century their jurisdiction included remote Dailam, the scene of an unsuccessful Christian mission during Timothy's reign.

Little is known about developments in Khorasan and Segestan during the ʿAbbasid period. Eliya of Damascus recorded that the metropolitan province of Merv had suffragan dioceses at 'Dair Hans', 'Damadut' and 'Da'bar Sanai' in 893, three places whose locations are entirely unknown. A little more is known about Segestan, where Timothy I fought back vigorously against the encroachment of the Jacobites. In Timothy's reign the cities of Zarang, Herat and Farah, which had been flourishing centres of Nestorian Christianity in the sixth century, were regularly receiving Jacobite bishops. Timothy wrote to the metropolitan Sargis of Elam, asking his correspondent to send him a young logic student of his acquaintance to be appointed metropolitan of Herat. He also, less successfully, consecrated a monk named Hnanisho^c metropolitan for Sarbaz in southeast Segestan. Hnanisho^c disregarded Timothy's instructions to proceed incognito to his province and made a conspicuous entry in his metropolitan robes into the cities of Basra and Ubullah, causing great offence to the local Muslim population. After quarrelling with and excommunicating the metropolitans of Maishan and Fars, who objected to his taking part in local disputes in their provinces, he suddenly took fright at the trouble he was stirring up and resigned from his office, returning to his monastery.

Besides shoring up the Nestorian presence in Khorasan and Segestan against the Jacobites, Timothy also tried to establish a metropolitan province for the regions of Dailam and Gilan, between Armenia and the Caspian Sea, which had offered only a nominal allegiance to Sasanian Persia and became virtually independent after the Arab conquest. During the Umayyad caliphate their warlike inhabitants raided the more settled areas of Persia almost annually, and Arab

garrisons were established late in the seventh century at Qazvin and Ardebil to corral them. In 760 the caliph al-Mansur made a determined effort to reduce both regions. He did not succeed in pacifying the mountain districts of Dailam, but was able to impose a degree of law and order in the coastal plain of Gilan, and conditions in 780 must have seemed reasonably promising for missionary activity. In Timothy's day the Dailamites were mostly either Zoroastrians or pagans, and had rarely come into contact with either Christianity or Islam. Shortly after 780 Timothy selected a group of monks from the monastery of Beth 'Abe to undertake the evangelisation of Dailam, under the leadership of the monk Shubhalisho^c, whom he consecrated metropolitan for Dailam and Gilan. A number of converts were made, but Shubhalisho^c was eventually murdered by a group of disgruntled Zoroastrians.

Timothy responded by consecrating two new metropolitans from Shubhalisho^c's original band of missionaries, Qardagh for the coastal plain of Gilan and his brother Yahballaha for the uplands of Dailam. He also consecrated a bishop named Eliya for the pagan city of Muqan, near the junction of the Aras and Kur rivers in the modern Mughan region, once again choosing a monk of the monastery of Beth 'Abe. The heroic exploits of these three bishops in unpropitious circumstances were lovingly described by Thomas of Marga in his *Book of Governors*, who talked up their successes as best he could. But although the successors of Shubhalisho^c escaped assassination and destroyed a few heathen idols, their mission fared little better than in their predecessor's day. Before long the Christians were faced with competition from Shi'ite Muslim missionaries who fled to the mountains of Dailam in 791 to escape the persecution of Sunni Muslims. By the twelfth century most of the Dailamites, except for an intransigent Zoroastrian minority, had converted to Islam. Nevertheless, some Christians could still be found in Dailam as late as the tenth century, as one of the bishops present at the consecration of Yohannan IV in 900 was the metropolitan Joseph 'of the Dailamites and the Geles'. During the tenth century the Christians of Dailam were placed under the authority of the bishops of Gurgan, a suffragan diocese of the province of Rai, but by the start of the eleventh century this diocese had been suppressed, 'due to the disappearance of Christianity from the region.'

Although the Church of the East failed in its attempts to establish a permanent presence in pagan Dailam at the end of the eighth century, the Nestorians were able to win a precarious foothold further to the north, in the Arran region of modern Azerbaijan. Arran, or Little Armenia, had long been a centre of Armenian Christianity, and it is not clear whether the Nestorians were working alongside Armenian missionaries to convert the region's remaining pagans or whether they were trying to win over Armenian Christians to their own Church. At any

rate Barda'a, the chief town of Arran, was the seat of a Nestorian metropolitan between the ninth and eleventh centuries, and represented the northernmost extension of the Church of the East. Barda'a was listed as a metropolitan province in 893 by Eliya of Damascus, and its earliest-known metropolitan, Sabrisho^c, was consecrated at the beginning of the tenth century. According to Eliya, the province of Barda'a had no suffragan dioceses, while 'Abdisho^c of Nisibis mentioned that the full name of the province was 'Barda'a and Shnika'. Shnika is the modern town of Chemaka, to the west of Baku, and was the capital of the Alans.

Although Nestorian missionary activity in Central Asia had not yet attained the scale it would reach during the Seljuq and Mongol periods, at least two attempts were made during the eighth century to organise the vast territories to the east of Rai and Khorasan into a metropolitan province. According to 'Abdisho^c of Nisibis, the first initiative in this respect was taken by the patriarch Sliba-zkha (714–28), who created metropolitan provinces for Herat, Samarqand, India and China, presumably in an attempt to link up the provinces of the eastern mission field. Several decades later, the activist patriarch Timothy I 'led the *kehagan* of the kingdom of the Turks to the faith', according to Mari, and consecrated a metropolitan for Beth Turkaye, 'the country of the Turks'. Beth Turkaye was simply another name for Sliba-zkha's province of Samarqand, although the fourteenth-century Nestorian writer 'Amr mistakenly thought that they were two separate provinces. The province of Samarqand was listed by Eliya of Damascus in 893 among the exterior provinces of the Church of the East and persisted into the Seljuq period, when two eleventh-century metropolitans of Samarqand are recorded. According to Eliya of Damascus, the province had no suffragan dioceses. Intriguingly, the Nestorians were not the only Christians proselytising in Central Asia at this period. They faced competition from a homesick Melkite community deported by the caliph al-Mansur from Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 762 to Tashkent. These improbable interlopers, led by a 'catholicus of Romagyris', maintained a distinct Christian identity on the banks of the Syr Darya well into the Mongol period.

The metropolitan province of China (Beth Sinaye) enjoyed several decades of prosperity around the end of the eighth century. The celebrated inscription on the Sian Tablet, a marble stele erected in Ch'ang-an by the capital's Christians in February 781, preserves the record of the Nestorian Church in China at the height of its influence. Significantly, the inscription is misdated to the reign of the patriarch Hnanisho^c II (773–80), who had been dead for several months: evidently the news of the accession of Timothy I in May 780 had not yet reached the Nestorians of Ch'ang-an. The tablet, an expensive gesture of piety, was commissioned by Yazdbuzid, a Persian Christian with important connections at

the T'ang court. Yazdbuzid, or I-ssu as he was called in Chinese, had been second-in-command of the strategic Shuo-fang army group in 756, when a number of Chinese frontier armies under the command of the Sogdian general An Lu-shan rebelled against the emperor Hsuan-tsung. The Shuo-fang armies remained loyal to the throne and, led by the veteran commander duke Kuo Tzu-i, put in some hard fighting against the rebels. Yazdbuzid distinguished himself in the campaigns against An Lu-shan, showing himself 'teeth and nails to the duke and ears and eyes to the army'. Although the imperial armies had initially to abandon the two Chinese capitals and fall back to the northwest, Hsuan-tsung's successor Su-tsung crushed the rebellion in 762. Uighur soldiers from the Chinese borderlands, many of them Christians at this period, took part in the decisive battle for Ch'ang-an in 761. Su-tsung and his immediate successors owed a debt of gratitude to Yazdbuzid and his fellow-Christians, and a number of flowery compliments were paid by the emperor Tai-tsung (762–79) to the Christian community in Ch'ang-an during the 770s. Like most official expressions of esteem in China, they cost nothing and meant little. Similar flattering addresses were also made to the city's small Muslim community.

The Sian Tablet inscription was composed by Adam, 'priest, bishop and *papash* of Sinistan', doubtless the metropolitan of Beth Sinaye, and the inscription also mentions the bishop Yohannan, the 'country-bishops' Yazdbuzid and Sargis and the archdeacons Gigoi of Khumdan (Ch'ang-an) and Gabriel of Sarag (Lo-yang). These references confirm that the Nestorian Church in China had a well-developed hierarchy at the end of the eighth century, with bishops and archdeacons in both northern capitals and perhaps elsewhere too. Shortly afterwards Thomas of Marga mentioned the monk David of Beth 'Abe, who was metropolitan of Beth Sinaye during the reign of Timothy I (780–823), and his disciple Peter, who accompanied him to China and later became bishop of the Arabian diocese of Yemen and Sana'a during the reign of Abraham II (837–50). Despite its remoteness from the Church of the East's heartland in northern Iraq, Ch'ang-an must have been a coveted posting for Nestorian bishops at this period. The comfortable life led by the Christian missionaries in Beth Sinaye at the end of the eighth century contrasted starkly with the hardships suffered by their counterparts in barbarous Dailam and elsewhere in the mission field.

Disaster struck in the middle of the ninth century. In 843 the emperor Wu-tsung ordered the expulsion of Zoroastrians and Christians from China, and though this order may have had little effect in the more remote parts of the country, it probably resulted in the closure of the Nestorian monasteries in Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang and an end to the cosy relationships that the metropolitans of Beth Sinaye had established at the imperial court. Wu-tsung's decree offers the

best context for the burial of the Sian Tablet. The expulsion was an act of state, and was doubtless preceded by an official notification. The Nestorian monks of Ch'ang-an therefore had enough time to bury the tablet in the grounds of A-lo-pen's monastery in Ch'ang-an before they left China. They may well have assumed that they would soon be back, but as far as is known they never returned to the T'ang capital. There were also disasters elsewhere in China. In 877 an Arab traveller mentioned the slaughter of thousands of Christians during a rebellion in Canton. The Nestorian mission in China probably never recovered from these two blows. It may well be significant that the province of Beth Sinaye was omitted from the list of metropolitan provinces compiled by Eliya of Damascus in 893.

In a letter written in the 780s to the metropolitan Sargis of Elam, Timothy I announced his intention of consecrating a metropolitan for Tibet (Beth Tuptaye). Tibet was a large and important independent kingdom in the eighth and ninth centuries, and its territories extended into Central Asia. Its capital Lhasa had a mosque at this period, and it is likely that both Islam and Christianity were introduced into the country by merchants from Samarkand and other stations along the Silk Road. Numerous Nestorian texts have been discovered in the caves of Tun-huang in Kansu, the eastern terminus of the Silk Road, and Tun-huang was under Tibetan control during Timothy's reign and for several decades thereafter. Timothy's metropolitan of Tibet, if he was ever consecrated, may well have sat in one of the Silk Road cities rather than Lhasa itself. A brief and enigmatic Sogdian inscription from Tanktse, a Silk Road town in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, mentions the despatch of the Nestorian monk 'Noshfarn' on an embassy to the king of Tibet in 825. Some scholars would like to believe that this embassy was as significant as that of A-lo-pen to China two centuries earlier, but neither its purpose nor its result are known. If it was ever created, the Nestorian province of Beth Tuptaye did not last long. An aggressive Buddhist reaction in the middle of the ninth century seems to have extinguished both the Muslim and the Christian presence in Tibet.

It is sometimes asserted that monks from the Nestorian mission in T'ang China introduced Christianity into Japan. Although many Japanese Christians like to boast of their supposed Nestorian ancestry, there is no evidence that Nestorian missionaries were ever active in Japan. Some enthusiasts claim to have detected on the surface of old stones the traces of Christian crosses, later erased by jealous Buddhists. These 'crosses' are invisible except to the eye of faith, and few impartial observers have been able to make them out. The alleged sightings of Nestorian texts from T'ang China in some of Japan's more venerable Buddhist monasteries are equally the products of a febrile imagination. It is certainly not impossible that Japanese envoys to China exchanged compliments with high-ranking Christian

clerics at the T'ang court. The Buddhist sage Kobo Daishi (774–835) is known to have visited Ch'ang-an just before the end of the eighth century, and may well have been introduced to the Nestorian metropolitan Adam. But a deep bow and an exchange of calling cards does not add up to a full-blown Christian mission to Japan. Only one Nestorian Christian is certainly known to have washed up on the coast of Japan, and he was dead on arrival. A thirteenth-century Mongol helmet, decorated with a Nestorian cross, was discovered several decades ago on a Japanese beach. It belonged to a Christian officer in the Mongol army assembled by Khubilai Khan for the invasion of Japan in 1281. The Mongol invasion fleet, as all Japanese schoolchildren know, was scattered by a providential storm—the *kamikaze* or 'divine wind'—and most of its ships foundered. The owner of this helmet, doubtless from one of the Mongolian tribes converted to Christianity in the eleventh century, was among the thousands of Mongol soldiers who lost their lives in this catastrophe. As far as is known, he was the closest any Christian got to Japan before the arrival of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century.

After several centuries of intermittent dependence on the Persian-speaking metropolitans of Fars, who also boasted of their descent from the apostle Thomas, the Saint Thomas Christians of India were finally brought under the authority of the patriarchs of Seleucia-Ctesiphon towards the end of the eighth century. The patriarch Timothy I, who was determined to break the power of the bishops of Rev Ardashir, definitively detached India from the province of Fars and made it a separate metropolitan province. There is a tradition in the Indian Church that two 'Syrian' bishops, Shapur and Peroz, were sent to Quilon from Mesopotamia in 823, the year of Timothy's death. They were accompanied by 'the famous man Sabrisho', perhaps a metropolitan consecrated by Timothy for India. As he had done in Fars, Timothy doubtless took care to appoint progressive churchmen for India to eradicate the undesirable practices introduced into the Indian Church by conservative Persian bishops. Towards the end of the ninth century, in response to an appeal from the Indians, the patriarch Enosh or a near-contemporary consecrated another Syrian metropolitan, Yohannan, for India, along with two suffragan bishops. On his arrival in India Yohannan may well have met an exotic foreign visitor, the English bishop Sighelm of Sherborne, who was sent in 883 by King Alfred to offer thanks at the tomb of Saint Thomas at Meliapur for his great victory over the Danes at Edington five years earlier. Sighelm's impressions of the Nestorians of India would have been of great interest to the scholarly Alfred, but have unfortunately not survived. One of Yohannan's suffragan bishops, 'Dua', was consecrated for Soqotra, and the other, Thomas, for 'Masin', a region traditionally identified with southern China. If this identification is correct, the consecration of a bishop for southern China, easily accessible from India by

sea, might be connected with the collapse of the Nestorian mission in northern China several decades earlier.

To the west of their heartland in northern Mesopotamia, the Nestorians strengthened their presence in Syria and Palestine and also moved into Cilicia, then under Arab occupation. The diocese of Damascus, established in the seventh century, was detached from the province of Nisibis and raised to metropolitan status by the patriarch Timothy I (780–823). Several metropolitans of Damascus are attested between the ninth and eleventh centuries. The Nestorian writer Eliya ibn ‘Uбайд, better known as Eliya of Damascus, was consecrated for Damascus in 893 by the patriarch Yohannan III and bore the title ‘metropolitan of Damascus, Jerusalem and the Shore’. ‘The Shore’ was probably a reference to the Nestorian communities in Cilicia. According to Eliya, Damascus had five suffragan dioceses at the end of the ninth century: Aleppo, Jerusalem, Mabbugh (Manbij), Mopsuestia, and Tarsus and Melitene (Malatya). Eliya’s information was surely correct on this point, though virtually nothing is known about any of these dioceses during the early ‘Abbasid period, except that Eliya himself was the Nestorian bishop of Jerusalem before he became metropolitan of Damascus. In all five dioceses small Nestorian communities would have lived amid a much larger Jacobite and Melkite population. The ruins of a Nestorian monastery near Jericho, apparently abandoned in the ninth century, have been discovered, and there may well have been other monasteries in Syria and Cilicia, though probably not many. Life was not always easy for these communities. There were several outbreaks of violence against the Christian minority in Syria and Palestine during the reign of the caliph al-Muqtadir (907–32), and in 924 a Muslim mob pillaged a Nestorian church in Damascus, carrying off church plate worth 200,000 gold dinars.

Doubtless for the sake of administrative convenience, two other Syrian dioceses, Raqqa and Resh‘aina (Ra’s al-‘Ain), were included in the province of Nisibis. The diocese of Raqqa, which also covered the town of Harran, is first attested in the seventh century and last mentioned towards the end of the eleventh century. Despite several centuries of Christian and Muslim rule, paganism was still alive and kicking in Harran, and the city’s heathens were still holding noisy processions in honour of their gods. According to Bar Hebraeus, during the reign of the caliph al-Ma’mun (813–33) Harran’s eccentric Muslim governor Ibrahim egged on the pagans, and on one occasion ordered several recently-built churches and synagogues in Harran to be demolished. He then changed his mind, and allowed the Christians and Jews to repair the damage. Most of the churches belonged to the Jacobites or Melkites, but at least one of them was Nestorian. The names of several Nestorian bishops of Raqqa are known, and the survival of a Syriac guide to the pronunciation of rare words in the Bible, copied by a

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Nestorian monk in the monastery of Mar Gabriel near Harran in 899, provides one of the very few testimonies to Nestorian activity in Syria at this period. The diocese of Resh'aina is first mentioned in the eleventh century, but was probably founded considerably earlier, perhaps during the high 'Abbasid period. Very little is known about this diocese. The bishop Shallita of Resh'aina, not otherwise attested, is mentioned as a liturgical author by 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, but it is not clear when he flourished.

MONASTICISM

Thomas of Marga and the Monastery of Beth 'Abe. The 'Abbasid period was a golden age for the Nestorian monastery of Beth 'Abe, founded just before the Arab conquest. Its remarkable flowering in the eighth and early ninth century was recorded by the bishop Thomas of Marga in the *Book of Governors*, one of the liveliest Nestorian texts from the ninth century. Thomas of Marga came from the village of Beth Sharonaye in the mountain district of Salakh. He entered the monastery of Beth 'Abe in 832, and several years later became the secretary of the patriarch Abraham II (837–50). At this period many of the monastery's monks had gone on to become bishops, and these senior figures in the church establishment were interested in a history of their *alma mater*. Thomas needed little persuasion to record for posterity the history of Beth 'Abe and the achievements of the most distinguished of its graduates. Besides being an entertaining and enjoyable read, the *Book of Governors* is an important source for the ecclesiastical history of the Church of the East in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries. Thomas had access to a wide range of written sources, including the correspondence of the patriarch Timothy I, and could also draw on the traditions of his old monastery and the long memories of its monks. He mentioned scores of monasteries in the province of Adiabene, and even the occasional nunnery. He also mentioned thirty or forty otherwise unattested bishops, and charted the changing diocesan organisation of the province after the Arab conquest. A particularly important passage in the *Book of Governors* mentions the prophecy of the monastery's superior Quriqos, who flourished around the middle of the eighth century, that forty-two of the monks under his care would later become bishops, metropolitans or even patriarchs. Thomas was able to name, and supply interesting information about, thirty-one of these bishops. One of them, Peter, was bishop of Sana'a in Yemen when Thomas was writing. In a striking testimony to the geographical extension of the Church of the East in the 'Abbasid period, all the more impressive because he was not seeking to create an effect, Thomas casually mentioned that Peter had

earlier served in China. Thomas also wrote a history of the monastery of Rabban Cyprian, also in the Marga district, and this earlier history has been tacked on to the history of the monastery of Beth ʿAbe in Wallis Budge's 1893 edition and English translation of the *Book of Governors*.

Not all of the Beth ʿAbe bishops had a peaceful life. The metropolitan Shubhalisho^c, who was sent with a group of monks from Beth ʿAbe to evangelise Dailam by the patriarch Timothy I, was murdered by the region's Zoroastrians. The Church of the East's northern Mesopotamian heartland was not immune from violence from Dailam either. Sargis, a monk of the monastery of Beth ʿAbe, was appointed bishop of Hnitha around the middle of the eighth century by the metropolitan Ahha of Adiabene. He abandoned his diocese after the district was raided by Dailamite marauders and fled back to the monastery of Beth ʿAbe, where he remained until his death. Thomas of Marga considered his flight discreditable, and remarked that he had 'failed to live up to the hopes that had been placed in him'. In fact, there was little reason for Sargis to suppose that he was any safer in the monastery of Beth ʿAbe than in his diocese. Monasteries, because of their wealth and their remoteness, were an obvious target for bandits. During the lifetime of Thomas of Marga, three Nestorian monasteries in Adiabene were pillaged by the Arab brigand Yaʿle bar Himran, who 'killed men as casually as he would kill a snake or scorpion'. Wanted by the civil authorities for a long catalogue of crimes, his gruelling night rides on an unsaddled and unbridled mare kept him one step ahead of the law, and gave his intended victims no warning of his approach. He was eventually tracked down and killed by the governor of Hdatta, but not before he had shocked the region's Christians by murdering Shubhalmaran, the superior of a monastery in Shenna d'Beth Ramman. Thomas of Marga was no stranger to such violence himself. During his youth the monastery of Beth ʿAbe was raided by the Kartaw Kurds. The monks saved their lives by scattering into the hills, but the monastery was thoroughly plundered. One old monk, Joseph, slept through the raid undiscovered by the plunderers, and his survival seemed to his incredulous comrades little short of miraculous.

The Monastic Horizons of the Church of the East. Another important monastic history, the *Book of Chastity*, was written by Ishoʿdnah of Basra a decade after Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors*. The *Book of Chastity* is a compilation of 140 brief lives of founders of monasteries and monastic writers. In some respects it is a disappointing work, as in nearly every case it supplies less information than the near-contemporary *Chronicle of Seert*, which was probably also written by Ishoʿdnah. Nevertheless, its coverage is significant. Although the Nestorians had over twenty dioceses in Beth Aramaye, Maishan and Beth Huzaye at this time,

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nearly all the monasteries and villages mentioned by Isho'dnah were in northern Mesopotamia. His notices confirm the impression given in the *Book of Governors* that, although perhaps a dozen or so isolated monasteries could still be found in southern Mesopotamia, there were few Christian villages south of Baghdad and that northern Mesopotamia remained, as it always had been, the heartland of the Church of the East. The book's success also had an important influence on the development of the Mar Awgin legend. The mythical solitary Mar Awgin was first claimed as the founder of monasticism in Iraq in the late seventh century, by the monastic writer Dadisho' of Qatar, but this audacious fiction may not have won immediate acceptance. Thomas of Marga, writing around 840, did not mention Mar Awgin in the *Book of Governors*, although he had plenty of opportunities to do so. Ten years later, however, Isho'dnah talked up Mar Awgin, and his *imprimatur* must have conferred respectability on the legend. The myth of Mar Awgin was repeated in the *Chronicle of Seert*, probably written in the 880s, and featured in all subsequent Nestorian histories.

If the reign of Timothy I was a golden age for the monastery of Beth 'Abe in northern Iraq, it was also a period of great prosperity for A-lo-pen's Nestorian monastery in the Chinese capital Ch'ang-an, the one monastery in the 'exterior provinces' whose history can be reconstructed in some detail. The Sian Tablet inscription of 781 lists the names, in both Syriac and Chinese, of some seventy monks of this monastery. Some of the Chinese names are phonetically close to the Syriac originals, but in many other cases they bear little resemblance to them. Some of the monks had distinctive Persian names, such as Izadsafas and Gushnasp, and were probably Persian Christians from Merv or Fars, but most had either commonplace Christian names or popular Syriac compound names such as 'Abdisho' ('servant of Jesus'). In such cases, it is impossible to guess at their place of origin. Some of the monks were doubtless Chinese, but perhaps not many. In 781 the monastery was basking in the favour of the T'ang emperor Te-tsung (779–805) and profiting from the patronage of the influential Persian soldier of fortune Yazdbuzid, who had thrown in his lot with the imperial dynasty in 756 at the outbreak of An Lu-shan's unsuccessful rebellion and had later reaped the rewards of his prescience. The two Nestorian monasteries in Ch'ang-an had probably been pillaged when the capital was occupied by An Lu-shan's armies, and Yazdbuzid returned them to their former splendour. Monasteries, mosques and synagogues in T'ang China closely resembled Chinese temples, and Yazdbuzid restored the roofs of the monastery's several buildings in true Chinese style, with brightly coloured tiles, 'so that they appeared like flying pheasants'. Among his other gifts were 'crystal glasses', a retirement present from the T'ang court in recognition of his military service against the rebels, and 'carpets of golden

weave'. A century earlier the patriarch Giwargis I, returning to Iraq from his visitation to the churches of Beth Qatraye, had presented the monastery of Beth 'Abe with some expensive Arabian altar cloths. Perhaps Nestorian monastic life, both in Iraq and in China, was rather more comfortable at this period than it is sometimes supposed to have been, and the solitary ideal was honoured more in theory than in practice.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

The Rise of Arabic. Baghdad under the 'Abbasid caliphs boasted some of the world's finest and most eminent scholars. Many of the caliphs were determined patrons of literature and scholarship, and Muslims, Christians and Jews alike contributed to the intellectual life of the caliphate. Such was the lure of the salons of Baghdad that Nestorian writers began increasingly to write in Arabic instead of Syriac. Most Nestorian authors of the Umayyad period had written in Syriac, but under the 'Abbasids the prestige of Arabic rose sharply. Although Syriac literature continued to flourish for several centuries more, ordinary Christians increasingly communicated with their Muslim neighbours in Arabic. Many Nestorian authors could switch effortlessly between Syriac and Arabic, and composed works in both languages. On the whole, however, their output stood more chance of reaching a wide audience if it was written in Arabic. Syriac tended to be used increasingly in the Church of the East for books written for internal consumption by its members. Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors*, for example, a ninth-century monastic history that no Muslim was ever likely to read, was written in Syriac. The Nestorians also continued to use Syriac in their liturgy. Here they differed from the other Syriac-speaking Churches. The Maronites of Lebanon and the Jacobites used Arabic to a far greater extent than the Nestorians in their church services. Their prayers, for example, were now often written in Arabic rather than Syriac. It is also significant that the Nestorians, unlike their Christian neighbours, did not follow the fashion for writing Arabic texts in Syriac characters. This practice is difficult to explain, as the scribes who used *garshuni* script, as it is technically known, were obviously bilingual and could equally well have used Arabic script. Presumably their readers, although they could speak Arabic fluently, could not read it well, and were better able to recognise Syriac characters. At any rate, the use of *garshuni* script in Arabic manuscripts, although widespread in Jacobite circles, was rare among the Nestorians. They preferred to maintain a proper distinction between the use of Arabic and the use of Syriac.

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Timothy I and His Contemporaries. One of the most important authors of the Church of the East during the 'Abbasid period was the patriarch Timothy I (780–823), who excelled as a scholar and a writer as well as an administrator. Timothy is known to have written the *Book of the Stars*, an astronomical treatise which has not survived, two volumes of canonical questions, and a defence of Christianity before the caliph al-Mahdi. He was also the author of some 200 letters, around 60 of which have survived. These letters, which shed important light on the administrative problems confronted by the Nestorian patriarchs, are of great interest. Timothy had a pithy way with words, and some of his sayings stick in the mind. 'The place is under the thumb of the Severans and needs someone who is a good arguer,' he wrote, proposing the appointment of a metropolitan for Herat. 'You should follow the example of the monks who go to China, carrying only a staff and a knapsack,' he wrote to the newly-consecrated metropolitan Hnanisho^c of Sarbaz, warning him to conduct himself discreetly while still on Muslim soil. The letters also shed light on Timothy's own personality. While his patriarchal office sometimes required him to be decisive, sometimes devious and sometimes positively unscrupulous, he was also a fine scholar who made the most of the opportunities open to bilingual Christians in the profitable translation business. He once ordered a hunt for Syriac and Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *Topics*, in response to a request from the caliph al-Mahdi for an Arabic translation of this work. The Jacobite patriarch Athanasius II (684–8) had translated the *Topics* into Syriac a century earlier, and Timothy suggested that his agent might start his search in the Jacobite monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul. He authorised him to commission copies of any text of interest, but stressed that absolute discretion was necessary. If the Jacobites realised that the enquiry was coming from the Nestorian patriarch, the sale would probably fall through.

Timothy also took a stage further the efforts made by his predecessor Hnanisho^c II (773–80) to compile the acts of all the synods of the Church of the East held since the fifth century. Hnanisho^c's search for these valuable records had been only partially successful, as much of this material had already been lost. However, he had been able to rescue for posterity the acts of the synods of Isaac (410), Yahballaha I (420), Dadisho^c (424), Acacius (486), Babai (497), Aba I (544), Joseph (554), Ezekiel (576), Isho'yahb I (585) and Gregory (605) from the Sasanian period, and the more recent acts of the synods of Giwargis I (676) and his own synod of 775. Timothy oversaw the publication of his predecessor's work, bringing it up to date by including the acts of a synod he himself convened in 790. The *Synodicon Orientale*, as Timothy's compilation is called, is an extremely valuable important historical source. Lost for centuries, it was only rediscovered towards the end of the nineteenth century, and its publication by J B Chabot

with an accompanying French translation in 1902 required the early history of the Church of the East to be substantially rewritten. The acts record the names of all the bishops who were present at the synods or who adhered to their acts by proxy, and provide detailed minutes of the doctrinal and administrative matters discussed. Besides high church policy, the synods also dealt with mundane matters of diocesan discipline, and throw fascinating light on the problems which the patriarchs and metropolitans faced in trying to maintain high standards of conduct among their widely-dispersed episcopate. The acts of the late-fifth-century synods of Acacius and Babai, in which the Church of the East allegedly accepted a Nestorian definition of faith, are of particular interest to modern historians, as they demonstrate that it did nothing of the sort. Had it not been for Timothy's far-sighted initiative (or rather, that of his neglected predecessor Hnanisho^c II), modern historians would have been deprived of a priceless resource for the study of the history of the Nestorian Church.

Timothy I and Thomas of Marga were not the only bishops of the Church of the East who found time to add to the treasures of Syriac literature. The patriarch Isho^c bar Nun (823–8), widely respected as a theologian and a canonist, was a prolific author in a number of genres. His *Select Questions*, a work of biblical exegesis, has survived, but most of his other works (including the books in which he attacked Timothy I, which were destroyed on his instructions) have been lost. Isho^cdad of Merv, bishop of Hdatta, who stood unsuccessfully against Theodosius in the patriarchal election of 853, wrote commentaries on both the Old Testament and the New Testament, which have survived in full. Isho^cdad quoted extensively in his commentaries from the text of Tatian's *Diatessaron*. This composite Gospel, long ago suppressed by the Chalcedonians, still retained some prestige among the Nestorians. Interestingly, the text used by Isho^cdad had evolved to accommodate readings from the 'approved' Peshitta Bible, indicating that the Nestorians were sensitive to Chalcedonian criticisms of Tatian's orthodoxy.

Theodore bar Konai, who flourished during the reign of Timothy I, is an important source for the history of religion. A native of Kashkar, Theodore is known to have written an ecclesiastical history and a number of funeral orations which have not survived. His only extant work is the *Book of Scholia* (*ketaba d'skolion*), written in 792. Ostensibly a commentary on the Bible, the *Book of Scholia* is in fact an encyclopedic collection of observations and elucidations, arranged into eleven *memre* or sections, that may have taken their point of departure from biblical passages but have been so elaborated that they are virtually monographs in their own right. Some of Theodore's 'elucidations' are quite fantastic, while others are of great value. Modern scholars are chiefly interested in the section of the *Book of Scholia* that deals with Christian heresies and with other religions, notably

Zoroastrianism, Manicheism and Islam. Although Theodore was principally concerned to attack the errors into which the heretics and the pagans had fallen, he could not do so without first describing what they believed and how they worshipped. These descriptions have preserved a great deal of very important information, particularly on Manicheism. Most of what is known about this much-maligned religion derives from hostile sources, making it very difficult to get at the truth. Theodore was no less hostile towards Manicheism than most other Christian writers, but he has delighted modern scholars by occasionally quoting from Mani's lost writings. Theodore probably drew on earlier sources for much of his material in this section, including Theodore of Mopsuestia's *On Magianism in Persia* and a study of heresy made by the fourth-century Greek writer Epiphanius of Salamis, which he probably consulted in a Syriac translation. The text of the *Book of Scholia* was edited in 1912 with Latin notes by Addai Scher.

Christian Apologetics. The most absorbing of the surviving works of Timothy I is his account of a defence of the Christian faith he supposedly made before the caliph al-Mahdi (774–85) shortly after he became patriarch. According to Timothy, the caliph buttonholed him one day after a meeting of his *majlis* and asked him how any reasonable man could accept the proposition that God had a son. This leading question prompted Timothy to explain the sense in which Christians believed just that, and the debate moved on from there. Both men showed considerable knowledge of each other's sacred books and made their points courteously, high-mindedly and sensitively, in accordance with the best traditions of disputation. Timothy corrected a number of common Muslim misconceptions about Christianity; and while he stoutly upheld the truth of the Christian faith, he did not attack Islam directly. Indeed, he was careful to praise Muhammad for leading the Arabs away from their pagan past and into monotheism. Neither of the protagonists shook the other's position, but at least they parted friends. The historicity of this meeting has been doubted. Although Timothy gave his conversation with al-Mahdi a plausible historical setting in the caliph's court in Baghdad in the early 780s, it is unlikely that this exchange of ideas ever took place. But that was beside the point. It easily could have done. Timothy was not recording the substance of a genuine conversation, but exploiting the generic conventions of the literature of debate to write a thoughtful book that rigorously explored the rival claims of Christianity and Islam. Rather in the manner of Plato's Socratic dialogues, he added excitement and drama to the play of argument by presenting the contest between the two religions as a debate. To impress upon his readers the gravity of the issues at stake, he made his protagonists a Christian patriarch and a Muslim caliph. Timothy's *Defence of the Faith*, initially published

in Syriac, was a huge success among the Christians of the caliphate. It was later translated into Arabic, clearly for the pleasure of Muslims as well as Christians. Alphonse Mingana produced a fine English translation of Timothy's *Defence* in 1925, and his edition has recently been reprinted by Gorgias Press under the title *The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi*. Timothy's *Defence* is easily the best specimen of the literature of debate between Christians and Muslims. It is not only a genuinely gripping book on a theme of the first importance. It also provides—and this was surely Timothy's intention—a model of how Muslims and Christians should discuss their differences with one another. Although Timothy wrote his book twelve centuries ago, its message is now more relevant than ever. It should be read widely by modern Muslims and Christians.

Debating in person with the commander of the faithful, Timothy was well advised to speak respectfully of Muhammad and the Muslim faith. A far more aggressive attitude towards Islam was shown by the Nestorian theologian 'Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, a younger contemporary of Timothy who flourished during the reign of the caliph al-Ma'mun (813–33). Al-Kindi debated the rival claims of Christianity and Islam in an exchange of letters with a highly-placed Muslim acquaintance, 'Abdallah ibn Isma'il al-Hashimi. In these letters, written in Arabic, he assailed Islam in vigorous terms. An English translation of al-Kindi's defence of Christianity, *The Apology of El-Kindi*, was published in 1882. Like Timothy and the caliph al-Mahdi, al-Kindi and al-Hashimi were both familiar with each other's beliefs. Al-Kindi was as well informed on the details of Muhammad's life as any good Muslim, and condemned the cruelty and treachery shown by the Messenger of God in his wars against the Meccans. He had also read the Qur'an attentively, and was able to point out inconsistencies in the sacred text of Islam. Some of his forays rather missed the point. The pilgrimage to Mecca may or may not have had its origins in a pagan procession, as al-Kindi scornfully claimed, but that did not necessarily invalidate the truth of Islam. He was on potentially firmer ground when he claimed that Muhammad had revealed nothing that Christians had not already known for centuries, and that where the prophet of Islam departed from Christian teachings it was in the wrong direction. Christianity, al-Kindi argued, operated on a higher moral plane than Islam. Muslims retaliated against an enemy, while Christians turned the other cheek. Muslims took several wives, Christians only one. Muslims expected a paradise of gross sensual pleasure, Christians the rational joy of union with God. These were heartfelt arguments, and if Christians had always practised what they preached they might have carried some weight. As it was, the Muslims had no monopoly on treachery and cruelty. In the perennial wars between the caliphate and the Byzantine Empire, Muslim and Christian troops behaved with equal brutality.

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Al-Hashimi refused to concede the moral high ground to the Christians. For his part, he had discussed Christianity with the patriarch Timothy and several of his bishops, and knew that the Nestorian, Jacobite and Melkite Churches were bitterly divided in their doctrines. Like many Muslims, he did not deny the ethical value of Christian teachings, but he was repelled by the doctrine of the Trinity and by the crucifixion. Al-Kindi invited him to compare the two religions for a year and then decide which of the two was better. His opponent is not recorded to have converted to Christianity.

Al-Kindi's *Apology* is unlikely to have changed many minds. Abu Nuh al-Anbari, the secretary of the patriarch Timothy I, probably had no more success with his *Refutation of the Qur'an*, a direct onslaught on the sacred text of Islam written in the early years of the ninth century. Had this text ever come to the attention of the Muslim authorities, Abu Nuh might well have been put to death for blasphemy; but he was writing to encourage Christians, not to influence Muslims, and as he wrote in Syriac it is doubtful whether any Muslim read this work. A more subtle approach was taken by the Nestorian polemicist 'Ammar al-Basri, who flourished around 850. 'Ammar defended the Christian faith in two important works, the *Book of Questions and Answers* (*kitab al-masa'il wa'l-ajwiba*), which taught Christian readers how to answer difficult questions put to them by Muslim acquaintances, and the *Book of Proof* (*kitab al-burhan*), which grounded its arguments for the truth of Christianity in reason. In one of his most interesting passages, 'Ammar asserted that most Christian converts to Islam had been actuated by unworthy motives. Some had been intimidated, or had converted to escape from the Muslim laws of restriction. Others had wanted to show solidarity with fellow-Arabs, or craved wealth and social advancement. Some had simply wanted to follow the fashion. 'Ammar had little time for these fainthearts, and contrasted them with 'men of intelligence'. These highbrow Christians had maintained their faith in the face of all discouragement, because they were swayed by reason rather than emotion. 'Ammar was writing primarily for a Christian audience, but his arguments were also calculated to appeal to an elite group of Muslim intellectuals who also prized reason above emotion. Indeed, he claimed to be making at least as valuable a contribution to the right understanding of the nature of God as the *mutakallimun*, the shrill Muslim theologians of the day. 'Ammar's works were dedicated to the reigning caliph, probably al-Mutawakkil (847–61), and he boldly suggested that the 'commander of the faithful' was obliged by his title to take seriously all theological points of view, not just those of the Muslims. It is doubtful if the choleric al-Mutawakkil took such a generous view of his constitutional responsibilities, but 'Ammar's works were certainly read by some Muslim intellectuals. The Muslim writer Abu

‘Isa al-Warraq singled him out for a personal attack in a treatise entitled *Against ‘Ammar the Christian, in Refutation of the Christians*.

History and Pseudo-History. Besides writing the *Book of Chastity*, Isho‘dnah of Basra is also known to have written an ecclesiastical history in three volumes, a few citations from which (covering events between the beginning of seventh century and the end of the eighth century) have survived in the works of Eliya Bar Shinaya and Bar Hebraeus. This history was long believed to have been lost, but may in fact have survived in the guise of the *Chronicle of Seert*, an anonymous history of the Church of the East in Arabic discovered in the first decade of the twentieth century. The *Chronicle of Seert*, so called because one of the two manuscripts of its text came from the monastery of Mar Ya‘qob the Recluse near Seert, has been preserved in two long extracts, covering the years 251–422 and 484–650 respectively. The beginning and the end of the history are missing, and scholars have placed the date of its composition as early as the ninth century and as late as the eleventh. A date in the second half of the ninth century is to be preferred, as the author flattered the Muslims outrageously in his account of the Arab conquest. The reason he did so is that he wanted them to read the section of his history that detailed the generous provisions of a treaty concluded by the prophet Muhammad with the Christians of Najran shortly before his death. The treaty in question was a forgery, which the Nestorians had ‘discovered’ in 878 and tried to pass off as a genuine seventh-century document. The *Chronicle of Seert* was therefore probably written during the reign of the patriarch Enosh (877–84), shortly after this sensational ‘discovery’, and at least one of its author’s aims was to win acceptance for the concessions supposedly granted to the Christians by Muhammad. There is no reason why Isho‘dnah should not have been its author, though there is equally no proof that he was. The first part of the *Chronicle* is an important source for Christianity in the early Sasanian period, and is particularly informative on the deportations of Shapur I during his campaigns against Valerian. The narrative gives considerable space to events in the eastern Roman Empire, and it is a great pity that it breaks off when it does. The author would certainly have discussed the Council of Ephesus in 431, and it would have been interesting to have a detailed account of the Nestorian controversy from a Nestorian viewpoint. Mari’s bitterly ironic sketch of these events, which fiercely defended the martyred Nestorius, may very well have been based on the lost account in the *Chronicle of Seert*. The second part of the *Chronicle* provides excellent coverage of the later Sasanian period and the early stages of the Arab conquest, and is a prime source for the schism of Narsai and Elisha^c and the reign of the patriarch Isho‘yahb II. An edition and French translation of the *Chronicle of Seert* by Addai Scher was published between 1910 and 1919.

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If the author of the *Chronicle of Seert*, who obviously had the instincts of a historian, could not resist citing forged Muslim documents, there was little to prevent his less scrupulous counterparts from indulging their taste for telling lies in the service of God. The ninth century vied with the sixth century as an age of forgery. As in the sixth century, the forgers concentrated on the first three centuries of the history of the Church of the East, about which little was known for certain. Having earlier talked up Addai, Mari and Thomas, the forgers now attempted to connect the apostolic founders with the principal dioceses of the Church of the East, notably Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The first bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was Papa, consecrated around 280. Even in the sixth century this was no longer good enough, and ingenious attempts had been made to link Papa with the apostle Mari, the evangeliser of Beth Aramaye, whose death had been placed by his inventor in 104. The sixth-century author of the *Acts of Mari* solved the problem in the simplest way possible. Ignoring the yawning gap of nearly two centuries that separated the two men, he brazenly declared that Mari had founded the diocese of Seleucia-Ctesiphon shortly before his death and consecrated Papa as his successor. Such a breathtaking falsification of history could not seriously be sustained, and later writers were more cunning with their inventions. In the ninth century Shahlufa and Aha d'Abuh, two late-third-century bishops of Erbil who had played a notable part in the affairs of the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, were converted retrospectively into early patriarchs. Aha d'Abuh was said to have governed the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon from 204 to 220, and Shahlufa from 220 to 224. For the second century, three patriarchs were frankly invented: Abris (121–37), Abraham (159–71) and Ya'qob (190). All three men were declared to be relatives of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, and given plausible backstories. These five phantom 'patriarchs' first feature in a list of patriarchs of the Church of the East given by the ninth-century historian Eliya of Damascus. By the twelfth century, their existence was an article of faith for the historian Mari ibn Sulaiman. Indeed, they are still included by courtesy in modern lists of patriarchs of the Church of the East. Perhaps the time has come for them to be removed once and for all from the historical record.

Besides writing five fictitious patriarchs into their version of history, the forgers also attempted to place one genuine bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon a century too early, in order to fill the distressingly long gap between Shahlufa (220–4) and Papa (c.280–329). An attempt was made to solve this problem by placing the reign of the fourth-century patriarch Tomarsa (388–95), whose historical existence is not in doubt, smack in the middle of the gap. This tradition, preserved in a number of early historical texts of the Church of the East, including the ninth-century history of Eliya of Damascus and Eliya bar Shinaya's eleventh-

century *Chronography*, was later abandoned, and from the twelfth century onwards Tomarsa has been assigned his proper place in the list of patriarchs.

The forgers also tried to link the Church of the East with the wider Christian *oikoumene* by invoking a blessing from the patriarchate of Antioch on its autonomy. In reality, the Church in Parthian and Sasanian Persia had developed independently from the Churches of the Roman Empire. When the Roman patriarchates were established in the fourth century, their jurisdiction did not extend beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire. The patriarchate of Antioch, whose territories bordered on the Sasanian Empire, never claimed jurisdiction over the dioceses of the Church of the East in Mesopotamia, and the Persian bishops never considered themselves to be suffragans of Antioch. In the ninth century an unknown forger invented a Persian mission to Antioch at the beginning of the third century to secure the consecration of the Persian bishop Aha d'Abuh by the 'patriarch' of Antioch. The Roman authorities intervened, the (non-existent) patriarch Sliba of Antioch was arrested and crucified, and Aha d'Abuh only escaped back into Persia by the skin of his teeth. As a result of this debacle, the Western patriarchs cut the Persian Church adrift. They wrote a letter asking the Persian bishops to choose their own leader in future and consecrate him directly in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. This hopelessly anachronistic story caught on, and was repeated in all the later ecclesiastical histories.

The Translation Movement. As the 'Abbasid caliphs consolidated their hold on Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia, Muslim scholars began to explore the intellectual heritage of the classical world. Their tastes were curiously limited. They were not interested in the glories of Greek literature. They did not want to read Homer in Arabic, nor the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. They saw little of value in the incomparable works of Herodotus or Thucydides, even though the latter had proclaimed his history 'a possession for all time'. Philosophy was more congenial to their tastes, though their exposure tended to be limited to a prescribed selection of the works of Aristotle. Few scholars progressed beyond this conventional syllabus, or made any acquaintance with Plato. Above all, they were interested in acquiring practical knowledge. They were gradually made aware by their Jewish and Christian subjects that Hebrew and Greek literature contained books on medicine, astronomy, physics and mathematics which could be immediately exploited if they were translated into Arabic. A demand for accurate Arabic translations established itself, which only the caliphate's Jews and Christians could satisfy. Few Arabs knew Hebrew or Greek, and even if they did they were not sure what books to look for or where to find them. The task of translating the heritage of the Roman Empire into Arabic therefore fell on bilingual Jewish and

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Christian scholars, who were familiar with this heritage and who enjoyed access to the superb book collections of Pumbeditha, Nisibis and Jundishapur and to smaller collections in their synagogues and monasteries. Their work helped to make medieval Baghdad one of the world's most important centres of learning. It is sometimes claimed that, during the 'Abbasid period, 'the torch of classical learning burned most brightly beyond the frontiers of Christendom', before it was finally passed back to benighted Europe during the Renaissance. This is an exaggeration. The bulk of the classical heritage, including nearly all texts of general interest, was preserved in the monasteries of the Latin West and the Greek East. But it is certainly true that the Arabs helped to preserve the texts of a fair number of philosophical and technical works that would otherwise have been lost, and scholars can only regret that their literary interests were not wider. Most of the credit for the preservation of these texts should be given to the Jewish and Christian scribes who translated them into Arabic at the behest of their patrons.

Nestorian, Jacobite and Melkite Christians all played their part in the work of transmitting classical Greek literature to the Arabs. However, the Church of the East had larger and better library collections than the other Churches, and Nestorian scholars contributed far more to the enterprise than their rivals. Many Greek books had already been translated into Syriac in earlier centuries, and as few Syriac-speaking Nestorian scholars at this period knew Greek as well as Arabic the first Arabic translations were made from these secondary Syriac versions rather than from the Greek originals. This short cut enabled a large number of classical texts to be rendered into Arabic quickly, and Arab scholars impatient to scrutinise the texts for their scientific value were at first prepared to tolerate a few mistakes and sacrifice some of the literary flavour of the original so long as they had something in their hands which they could read with profit.

The vogue for translating useful classical Greek works into Arabic, both directly and through the medium of Syriac, reached its peak in the ninth century, and an outstanding contribution in this field in both quantity and quality was made by the Nestorian doctor Hunain ibn Ishaq (808–73), a 'devotee' from the prickly Nestorian community of Hirta. Fluent in both Syriac and Arabic, Hunain studied medicine at Baghdad in his youth under a doctor of the House of Wisdom, and is said to have been dismissed because his questions became too hard for his tutor to answer. He then spent two years abroad, either in Constantinople or Alexandria, and returned to Mesopotamia after adding Greek to his other languages. He became chief physician to the caliph al-Mutawakkil, and over a number of years at court put his linguistic talents to use in translating much of the extensive corpus of the Greek physician Galen into Arabic. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Hunain translated his author's meaning instead of providing

a literal, word-for-word translation. A conscientious and dedicated scholar with a natural feel for language, his translations set far higher standards of linguistic accuracy and critical acumen than any of his more literal-minded predecessors had achieved, and he pointedly revised earlier Arabic translations of Galen's works made by the sixth-century Jacobite scholar Sergius of Resaina and more recently by the Nestorian scholar Job of Edessa. Job of Edessa, a slightly older contemporary of Hunain, wrote a fascinating scientific dictionary in Syriac known as the *Book of Treasures* (edited with an English translation by Alphonse Mingana), but his Arabic was evidently not up to the demands of technical translation. Hunain was helped in his translation work by his son Ishaq and his nephew Hubaysh, and this team covered a lot of ground in a short time. The Arabs regarded medicine and philosophy as related fields of exploration, and Hunain followed up his translation of the works of Galen by translating part of Aristotle into Arabic. He also translated works on astronomy, mathematics and magic, and produced an Arabic version of the Septuagint for Christian readers. Hunain's achievement placed at the service of Arab doctors the most practical, comprehensive and organised medical treatise yet compiled, and helped the medieval Arab world to build up a medical expertise which Western Christendom could only envy. Except in the field of mathematics, where he lacked the specialist knowledge for a mastery of the discipline, his translations were so good that they did not need to be revised. They became immediate classics, and were read by Arab scholars with both pleasure and confidence.

Many of the Christians who took part in the translation movement were motivated not just by the money they could make. They were also concerned, particularly through their translations of philosophical works, to defend the Christian faith to an elite group of Muslims who shared their admiration for the truths of philosophy. Christians had long ago realised that, for educated pagans, philosophy functioned almost as a religion. Plato and Aristotle had taught men how to live well, and all that was necessary for the good life was to follow their precepts. The discipline of philosophy therefore enjoyed great prestige within the Roman Empire, and as soon as they could the Christians appropriated it to their own uses. The emperor Justinian forbade pagans to teach philosophy and closed down Plato's Academy in Athens; and educated Christians began to bolster the intellectual appeal of Christianity by citing Aristotle in support of their arguments from Scripture. This fashion spread beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, and by the seventh century Nestorians and Jacobites were both appealing to Aristotle in defence of their own particular christologies. In ninth-century Baghdad Aristotle enjoyed far more prestige than Plato, who was hardly read at all, and was praised as 'the master of all who know' by both Christian and

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Muslim intellectuals. This shared reverence for Aristotle's teachings offered a rare opportunity for dialogue between the two faiths. Muslim rationalists, excited by the possibilities of a way of life grounded in 'common humanity' (*al-insaniyyah*), and dismayed by the rhetorical tricks employed by many Muslim theologians, debated eagerly with educated Christians who accepted the same Aristotelian premises. It was a world in which the Jacobite logician Yahya ibn 'Adi learned his trade from the Nestorian scholar Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunan, an accomplished translator of Greek philosophical literature, and passed on his wisdom to an admiring circle of Christian and Muslim pupils. Yahya famously responded to an attack by the Muslim philosopher al-Kindi on the Christian idea of the Trinity, refuting in Aristotelian terms al-Kindi's argument that a composite entity must have been formed at some point, and could not therefore be eternal. The Nestorian 'Isa ibn 'Ali, one of Yahya's pupils, became a noted scholar in his turn, so the debt owed by the Jacobite teacher to the Church of the East was eventually repaid. The great Hunain ibn Ishaq exploited his prestige as the *doyen* of the translation movement to write a number of works of Christian apologetic, one of which bore the title *On the Fear of God*. Some scholars, understandably, have hailed this courteous and well-informed exchange of ideas between leading Christian and Muslim philosophers in 'Abbasid Baghdad as a model for modern interfaith dialogue; but it is doubtful whether the mutual esteem of a coterie of cultivated academics did much to change attitudes beyond the ivory tower. The 'Abbasid caliphs did not stop pulling down Christian churches because they discovered a respect for 'common humanity'.

Literature from the Exterior Provinces. The missionary zeal of the Church of the East was probably at its height during the early 'Abbasid period, and some at least of the many Nestorian bishops and monks working in Central Asia, India and China might reasonably be expected to have written books worth reading. They did, but only in China, and only to a very modest extent. In Central Asia, where they were working among tribesmen of a far lower cultural level, the Nestorian missionaries contented themselves with translating existing Christian literature from Syriac into the local languages. Improving texts were translated into Persian for use in northern Arabia, Khorasan and Segestan, and into Sogdian, Turkish and Uighur for use further east. Only a few scraps of this literature in translation have survived, and these remnants, significantly, are largely confined to fragments of the Bible and the service books, martyr acts, hagiographies such as the Barshabba legend and other edifying Christian stories. One Sogdian narrative, doubtless based on a Syriac original, recounted the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, but for some reason raised their number to eight. There is no reason to suppose that

humble Christian villagers in Central Asia were interested in reading Aristotle, and no reason to suppose that their priests thought they should. Monks, of course, preferred more sophisticated reading material than their lay brothers, and the discovery of a Sogdian translation of the *Antirrhetikos* of Evagrius of Pontus in the ruins of a Nestorian monastery at Bulayiq in the Turfan oasis scarcely comes as a surprise. Among the few original Christian compositions from Central Asia is a fragmentary text in Turkish that purports to explain the origins of fire worship in Persia. Perhaps some Christians beyond the Oxus, even at this late period, were tempted by the seductions of Zoroastrianism.

It was a very different story in China. The Nestorian missionaries in T'ang China, operating in a highly literate milieu, communicated with their hosts in Chinese, and most of the original Nestorian literary productions from the exterior provinces come from China. In the early years of the twentieth century a number of Nestorian devotional texts were recovered from the sands of Tun-huang and other stations along the Silk Road. Most of these texts are still only available in English in a turgid translation made in the 1930s by the Japanese scholar Yoshiro Saeki, and this has not improved their readability. Some mystics have professed to find one of these texts, the so-called *Book of Praise*, edifying. In fact, they are all exactly what might have been expected in such a context. They are workmanlike, slightly pedestrian expositions of the Christian faith, marred by the poor quality of the Chinese in which they were written. Their main attraction for the scholar is that they illuminate the problems faced by the early Christian missionaries in China in translating their doctrines into the language of an alien culture. In the earliest text from China, probably to be dated to 641, the Nestorians used the Chinese proper name *Fo*, 'Buddha', for God, and *liang feng*, 'cool wind', for the Holy Spirit. They soon realised that these terms conveyed the wrong impression, and by the eighth century they were directly transliterating the Syriac names for God (*Allaha*), Christ (*Mshiha*), and the Holy Spirit (*Ruha d'qudsba*) into Chinese.

It is sometimes claimed that the Nestorian missionaries in T'ang China were infected by Buddhist and Taoist teachings, and modified their Christianity in response to these alien influences. Nothing could be further from the truth. As the present age demonstrates, far from going native in a foreign country, religious minorities tend to cling even more closely to their own faith. So with the Nestorians in China, who were not so isolated from their heartland in Iraq as is often asserted. The so-called Buddhist or Taoist 'influences' which appear in the Nestorian texts from Tun-huang are illusory. They simply reflect the struggle faced by the early Christian missionaries to hammer out a flexible vocabulary in Chinese with which to convey a distinctly Christian theology. The Nestorians were at first forced to rely on Buddhist and Taoist phraseology because it was the only vocabulary

available. During the seventh and eighth centuries they gradually developed their own religious vocabulary, with considerable success. The Chinese term they eventually coined for the Trinity, *san-yi miao-shen*, 'the mysterious union of three persons', would have passed muster with the most carping Jacobite theologian.

The growing competence of the Nestorians in literary Chinese flowered at the end of the eighth century in the sole text from T'ang China that rewards detailed study. The Sian Tablet inscription, composed in 781 by the Nestorian metropolitan Adam of Beth Sinaye, is a masterpiece of cross-cultural communication. Christian missionaries in China have tended to depreciate this text because it so often uses the language of expediency. They have failed to appreciate the circumstances in which the inscription was written. Above all, it was a tourist guide. The Sian Tablet stood in the grounds of the earliest Nestorian monastery in Ch'ang-an, founded by the monk A-lo-pen in 638, and the inscription was written for Chinese visitors curious to know a little more about an exotic foreign religion. Its message was crafted accordingly. The inscription promised to account for the spread of the 'Syrian brilliant teaching' (*Ta-ch'in ching-chiao*), as Christianity was by now called, in China. It sketched the outlines of the Christian faith in terms that a Chinese reader could appreciate, stressing that Christianity was a force for social harmony. It explained the cross worn by the Nestorian missionaries in China as a symbol of the four corners of the world, in deference to the distaste of many educated Chinese for a religion whose god had been a crucified criminal. It retailed a number of fanciful Chinese traditions about Ta-ch'in, emphasising that Christianity had originated in a region to the west of Persia that had been precisely located by eminent Chinese geographers. It observed that those T'ang emperors who had welcomed the preaching of Christianity in China had prospered, while those who had persecuted the Christians had come to a bad end. It noted that the leaders of the Nestorian Church in China had important connections at court going back several decades, and delicately alluded to the support given by the Christians to the emperor Su-tsung during An Lu-shan's rebellion. It mentioned the compliments that had been paid to the monastery by the reigning emperor Te-tsung and several of his predecessors. Finally, it asserted that the Christians in China were even more public-spirited than the Buddhists, who prided themselves on their good works. These agreeable platitudes would have given visitors a favourable impression of the Christian faith, and encouraged them to explore the monastery's many treasures.

Ironically, Adam's confidence in the quality of his Chinese backfired only a year later. In 782 he collaborated with Prajna, a Buddhist monk who had just arrived in China from India, on a translation of a Buddhist sutra from Uighur into Chinese.

Prajna knew little Uighur and no Chinese, while Adam had only the vaguest idea of Buddhist teachings. Adam, who went under the Chinese name Ching-ching, must have been the main translator, and unwisely introduced into his text a number of Chinese expressions that had acquired a distinct Christian colouring. The translators presented the fruits of their labours to the emperor Te-tsung, expecting praise. 'But the emperor was not fooled at all. He was a shrewd man and a fine scholar, and had a great respect for the Shakya canon. He examined their translation and found that they had muddled the author's thought and obscured the clarity of his language.' The result was a stinging rebuke, delivered publicly in the form of an imperial decree, to both Adam and his Buddhist collaborator:

The Shakya monastery and the 'Ta-ch'in monastery have different customs and conflicting religious beliefs. Let Ching-ching hand down the teachings of Christ, and the Shakya monks publish the scriptures of Buddha. The boundaries of the two doctrines must be kept distinct, and their followers must not intermingle. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy are two different things. The King and Wei rivers flow in two different courses.

Both men, doubtless, trembled and obeyed. The story demonstrates that there were fascinating intellectual opportunities available for Nestorian Christian scholars in late eighth-century Ch'ang-an. It is also a salutary reminder of the perils of collaborative research.

Chapter Five
A CHURCH AT BAY
(906–1221)

OVERVIEW

Although the ‘Abbasid caliphs continued nominally to rule in Baghdad until 1258, for the last three centuries before the Mongol conquest power lay in the hands of two warrior dynasties, the Buyids of Dailam and the Turkish Seljuqs. The world of Islam fragmented, and although the caliphs still sat at Baghdad and were accorded a degree of respect as guardians of the faith, true power lay in the hands of the Buyid and Seljuq sultans. These military commanders owed their prestige to their prowess in arms. Seljuq commanders turned the tide of battle against the Byzantines and reconquered territories in northern Syria and Cilicia which had earlier fallen to the infidel. In 1071 Alp Arslan decisively defeated the Byzantine emperor Romanus IV Diogenes at Manzikert, paving the way for the Seljuq conquest of Anatolia.

The number of Christians living in the caliphate fell significantly during this period. Based on an examination of tax records, which enable a reasonable estimate to be made of the Christian population of the larger cities, scholars have identified the tenth and eleventh centuries as a period of increasing conversions to Islam, or of emigration out of the caliphate into Byzantine territory. There was also a distinct move towards consolidation among the Christians who remained. Christians left districts where they were in an uncomfortably small minority and banded together in search of security.

As usual, conversions to Islam were driven partly by its attractions as a religion and partly by the social and financial advantages conversion brought. Christians were held in increasingly low esteem, and were subject to a range of restrictions of greater or lesser severity. In theory, these restrictions should have been applied consistently. In practice, they were ignored, relaxed or tightened at the caprice of the reigning caliph or his officials. Scholars have vainly attempted to find comforting patterns in the policy of the later ‘Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs towards the Christians. There was no pattern. The quality of life for Christians living under Muslim rule depended almost entirely on the disposition of individual caliphs,

whether they sat in Baghdad or Cairo. Mari and Bar Hebraeus portrayed the early eleventh-century 'Abbasid caliph al-Qadir (991–1031) as a fair and reasonable ruler, who personally intervened in 1002 after an outbreak of mob violence in Baghdad to ensure that his Christian subjects received justice. But at the same time, further to the west, the despotic Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (996–1021) launched a decade-long persecution against the Jews and Christians of Egypt, Palestine and Syria which was only ended after thousands of Christians had either converted to Islam or fled for their lives into Byzantine territory. There was neither rhyme nor reason in this concatenation of events.

The number of Nestorian Christians in southern Mesopotamia and in Persia fell dramatically under the Buyids and the Seljuqs. To some extent, conversions to Islam must have contributed to this decline, but much of it was probably due to emigration to northern Mesopotamia, where the Nestorians were beginning to consolidate in the provinces of Mosul and Nisibis. It seems very likely that the Nestorian population of northern Mesopotamia actually rose, as several new dioceses were created in these two provinces. Meanwhile, in the exterior provinces, there were both failures and successes. The Nestorian mission in T'ang China collapsed, but a few decades later Nestorian missionaries in Central Asia scored some spectacular successes, converting several Mongolian tribes to Christianity.

On the whole, however, the Church of the East stood at bay during the Seljuq period. It was an age of worldly accommodation with the Muslim authorities, in which corruption was commonplace and high ideals were in short supply. The Nestorian patriarchs during the three final centuries of the 'Abbasid caliphate were probably richer than they had ever been, and their institutional relationship with the caliphs was now defined by letters of appointment which spelled out the privileges theoretically enjoyed by the Christians. At the same time, disputes between Christians and Muslims became more frequent, and references in the historical sources to the destruction, pillage, confiscation or ransom of churches and monasteries increase. Despite increasing Muslim pressure the Nestorians continued to squabble with the Jacobites and the Melkites, and their patriarchs spent much time, money and effort in asserting their dignity against their Christian rivals. The monastic ideals of the Sasanian period were also now a thing of the past. Few solitaries now probed the limits of self-mortification. Instead, the Nestorian monasteries became proverbial among Muslims for the agreeable lifestyle of their monks. Not all Nestorian patriarchs, bishops and abbots were corrupt or self-indulgent, of course, but the worldliness of the Church of the East at this period was admitted even by the Nestorians themselves. In fact, this development was merely part of a wider Christian trend. In both the Latin West and the Greek East prelates were assuming the airs of princes and shamelessly

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exploiting their privileged positions to enrich themselves. Christian practice has often fallen short of Christian theory during the long and eventful history of the Church, but rarely has the gap between the two been wider than in the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.

Under the 'Abbasid caliphs, Muslim, Christian and Jewish scholars had turned Baghdad into one of the world's most renowned centres of learning; and many of the Turkish sultans were just as interested as their predecessors in the interchange of ideas. Although Christian scholars no longer translated Greek texts into Arabic as fervently as they had done in the days of al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun, some Christian leaders continued to debate theology with their Muslim counterparts. Nevertheless, Nestorian literature from the Buyid and Seljuq periods was distinctly conservative. Many writers were more concerned to arrange and codify existing knowledge than to break new ground. This 'encyclopedic' tendency, which has been noticed by scholars, probably reflected a feeling that the Church of the East had already seen its best days.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Tenth-Century Nestorian Patriarchs. Yohannan IV was succeeded by Abraham III (906–37), one of the more repulsive patriarchs of the Church of the East. Abraham, who was bishop of Marga at the time of Yohannan's death, was lucky enough to be in Baghdad for a court case during his predecessor's final illness, and created an initial good impression with the Christians in the capital by attending to Yohannan's needs during his last days. He then consolidated his position by bribing enough bishops to secure his election. The office of metropolitan of Elam was vacant at the time, and the consecration of the newly-elected patriarch devolved upon the metropolitan Shila of Maishan. Abraham courted Shila assiduously, buying his support with a golden chalice filled with 200 pieces of gold. Abraham shrugged off the charges of simony brought against him by his enemies, and after his election and consecration sold the archdiocese of Nisibis three times in close succession for the enormous sum of 270,000 dinars. Although two of the buyers died soon after assuming their new dignity, Abraham pressed their relatives for payment of the sums owed. As Mari deliciously put it, 'Abraham went beyond the usual rate in selling the priesthood for money'. Abraham was once rebuked by the Christian notable Abu Ishaq Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Iskafi, who called to pay his respects and found him counting up his money in the patriarchal cell. 'I will no longer recognise you as patriarch! You dress like Simon Peter, but you act like Simon Magus!' Abraham excommunicated Abu Ishaq for this insolent remark.

Abraham was determined to assert the primacy of the Church of the East over the other Christian minorities in the caliphate. The most important event of his reign was a crisis provoked in 912 by the despatch by the Greek patriarch of a metropolitan to Baghdad to minister to the city's growing population of Melkite Christians. Abraham was able to extract a rescript from the caliph al-Muqtadir (907–32) stipulating that only the catholicus of the Nestorians might reside permanently in Baghdad. In cases of dire necessity, other bishops might pay a brief visit to the 'Abbasid capital, but must leave as soon as their business was concluded. This concession, obtained by a bribe of 30,000 gold dinars to al-Muqtadir, represented a striking victory for the Nestorians over both the Melkites and the Jacobites, and the Nestorians invoked al-Muqtadir's guarantee on several occasions thereafter in defence of their privileges. Interestingly, Abraham argued in court that the Greeks could not be trusted, while the Nestorians could. According to Bar Hebraeus, it was an argument that nearly backfired:

'We Nestorians,' said the catholicus, 'are the friends of the Arabs, and pray for their victory. How can this enemy of the Arab people possibly be given the same honours as me?' The vizier replied, 'You Christians are all alike! You all hate us, and you just put on a show of friendship!' The catholicus was struck dumb, and could not find a word to say. But he promised a thousand dinars to one of the great doctors of the Arabs, who was sitting next to him, to take up his cause. This man said, 'How can you treat the Nestorians, who have no other ruler except the Arabs, the same as the Greeks, whose kings are constantly at war with the Arabs? Look at the way they behave! It is obvious that the former are our friends and the latter our enemies.' The Arabs who were standing by all applauded the doctor's words.

Abraham seems to have been a thoroughly unsavoury character, but he did not lack a certain boldness. He once found himself on the wrong side of an internal dispute over money, when a Christian woman tried to prevent her husband from making a large donation to the Church. Abraham bullied her outrageously in an attempt to make her change her mind, but she refused to accept his authority and eventually threw herself on the protection of the Muslim authorities. This was a direct challenge to Abraham's status, and he asserted his right to settle the affairs of the Christians without Muslim interference. Deplorable though his behaviour had been, he knew he had the law on his side. He made the most of his case. Summoning a crowd of Christian monks, priests, scribes and doctors, he staged

a sit-down protest in front of the vizier's palace. He and his supporters began chanting 'Woe for Islam! Woe for Muhammad!' The vizier, acutely embarrassed, sent the caliph's Christian secretary Ibn Shanjala to invite the patriarch to a private audience. 'Talk to him gently,' he instructed the secretary, 'and tell him that if he won't come to me, I will go out to him.' Abraham accepted the invitation, and was ushered into the vizier's presence. He then claimed his patriarchal rights, flourishing a rescript that had been written for the patriarch Yohannan IV by the caliph al-Mu'tadid (892–901). The vizier, realising that it might be unwise to challenge the authority of this document, caved in. 'Enough! Stop making trouble! Just be quiet, and I will give you what you want!' The terrified woman was handed over to the patriarch, and Abraham 'was able to make good all his claims on her'. In other words, she was forced to withdraw her objections to her husband's donation.

Abraham III lost his sight in 935 and died two years later, after a reign of thirty-one years. The bishop Eliya of Anbar was elected in his place, but ruined his chances by an ill-judged attempt to gratify the Christian secretary Ibn Shanjala. Ibn Shanjala had an elderly wife and was childless, and Eliya promised that he would allow him to take a concubine after he became patriarch. Many men in his position, perhaps, would have closed with this generous offer, but Ibn Shanjala was a man of principle. He was mortally offended, and tore up the letter of appointment that had just been signed by the caliph al-Radi (933–40). Disgusted with the attitude of the Nestorian bishops, the secretary then forced them to accept the appointment of Emmanuel, a virtuous monk of the monastery of Abba Joseph in Balad who had been recommended to him by the caliph's Sabaeen doctor Ibn Sinan. Angered that a monk had been chosen instead of one of their own number, some of the Nestorian bishops attempted to boycott the consecration. Ibn Shanjala placed guards on their residences and ordered the metropolitan Luke of Mosul and Erbil, who had been apprehended while attempting to escape from Baghdad in disguise, to consecrate the new patriarch. Emmanuel I (937–60), who was at first reluctant to accept his appointment, was described by Mari as a handsome old man but 'somewhat harsh by nature and very avaricious'. He took a genuine interest in the administration of the Church, and by the end of his twenty-three year reign had accumulated 70,000 pieces of gold and 600,000 pieces of silver in the patriarchal cell. Unfortunately, this money proved to be an irresistible source of temptation to the next generation of patriarchal administrators, and the historian Mari felt that it would have been better if Emmanuel had distributed it to the poor. Besides racking up these divisive surpluses, Emmanuel also appointed bishops to every vacant diocese. He also won the confidence of the powerful emir Ibn Ra'iq (assassinated, alas, in 942), who treated the Christians kindly as a result of

his friendship with the patriarch. Emmanuel died in April 960 and was buried, 'as was the custom for noblemen', in a magnificent wooden coffin. His funeral obsequies were marred by a quarrel over precedence between the 'devotees' of Hirta and their despised rivals of Kashkar.

Contrary to expectation, the patriarchal election which followed Emmanuel's death was bitterly contested. Abu ʿUmar, the secretary of the grand chamberlain Subuktekin, and the treasurer Abu ʿAli made known their preference for the metropolitan of Elam, Giwargis, and he would have been elected if Abu ʿAli had not changed his mind at the last moment and transferred his support to the 90-year-old bishop Israel of Kashkar, described by Bar Hebraeus as 'venerable and chaste, but a doddering old man'. Israel had attracted Abu ʿAli's attention in 947, when he entertained the caliph al-Mutiʿ (945–73) and his entourage when they passed through Kashkar on their way to Basra to put down a local rebellion. Abu ʿAli asked Israel whether the caliph would defeat the rebels, and Israel, claiming to be a seer, diplomatically assured him that he would. His forecast was correct, and the incident obviously impressed Abu ʿAli. The youthful metropolitan Giwargis of Mosul and Erbil, who was also intending to stand for election, was told 'Next time!' and the metropolitans of the electoral college were directed to vote for Israel. Giwargis and his party were not prepared to acquiesce meekly in Israel's election, and the supporters of the rival candidates clashed in the streets of Baghdad. In this intimidating atmosphere, a number of bishops fled rather than cast their votes for Israel. But Abu ʿAli was able to override all opposition, claiming to be acting with the support of both the caliph al-Mutiʿ and the sultan Muʿizz al-Dawla. Israel was duly elected, and Abu ʿAli organised his procession by barge to Baghdad, where he was consecrated in May 961. Abu ʿAli died the following day, prompting the disappointed metropolitan of Elam to remark, 'If only he had died a day earlier!' The elderly Israel soon followed his protector to the grave. His reign lasted only 110 days, and he died in September 961.

Israel was succeeded by ʿAbdishoʿ I (963–86), formerly bishop of Maʿaltha. ʿAbdishoʿ, a native of Karka dʿGedan in Beth Garmai, had studied logic in his youth under Ibn Nasiha, a pupil of the Jacobite sage Mushe bar Kepha, and his name was put forward by Hasan Bar Bahlul, the celebrated Nestorian lexicographer. His election was contested by three other candidates, all of metropolitan rank: Giwargis of Elam, Giwargis of Mosul and Erbil and Ishoʿzkhā of Beth Garmai. ʿAbdishoʿ, however, was the sultan Muʿizz al-Dawla's favourite candidate, and he summoned the assembled bishops to a banquet to win them over to his choice. The new patriarch was elected and consecrated six months after his predecessor's death. ʿAbdishoʿ was a pious and well-read man, but would have been a better patriarch if he had demanded the highest standards of conduct

from his officials. Some of his assistants enriched themselves during his reign from the ample funds left in the treasury by Emmanuel I. Their peculation mostly went unchecked by the patriarch, though 'Abdisho' dismissed one or two men in his entourage whose misdeeds were too scandalous to escape notice. He also did not always discipline his bishops as they deserved. He deposed the arrogant bishop Abraham of Kashkar, who was ruling his diocese with a high hand, but later relented and sent him back to his former diocese of Hamadan. In other respects, however, he was a sound administrator. He is said to have consecrated altogether 134 metropolitans and bishops. At the time of his death only three archdioceses (Merv, Mosul and Erbil, and Basra) did not have an archbishop; and the vacancy in the archdiocese of Basra, due to the death of its metropolitan 'Abd al-Masih, occurred only two days before 'Abdisho's own death. He was also able to show admirable flexibility in trivial matters. Unashamed to learn from his rivals, he directed that the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer should be recited in unison by both priest and people, as was the custom among the Jacobites.

'Abdisho' I was succeeded by Mari bar Tuba (987–99), a well-connected member of an established scribal family. During his youth he left an important secretarial position to embrace the monastic life, and eventually became superior of the monastery of Mar Eliya near Mosul. He was appointed visitor of the Mosul monasteries by 'Abdisho' I, and made a number of improvements in the way they were run. Recognising his ability, 'Abdisho' consecrated him metropolitan of Fars. He became patriarch in 987 simply because he happened to be in the right place at the right time. Following the death of the sultan 'Adud al-Dawla in 983 the succession was disputed by his two sons Sharaf and Samsam. In 986 Sharaf al-Dawla seized Shiraz and advanced slowly on Baghdad through Beth Huzaye and Maishan. Mari accompanied Sharaf on his campaign, using his influence as metropolitan to limit the extent to which the Christian communities of the region were plundered by the emir's troops. The Christians of Beth Huzaye had been reduced to poverty by their exactions, but Mari succeeded in obtaining the return of some plate that had been stolen from the Nestorian cathedral in Jundishapur. Sharaf was at Basra with his army when a messenger brought the news that the catholicus of the Nestorians had just died at Baghdad. Mari had made a good impression on Sharaf during the campaign, and the emir turned to two Christian advisers on his staff. 'Is there any reason why the metropolitan who is with us now should not become catholicus?' The two advisers could not think of any, and kissed the ground. Shortly afterwards Sharaf al-Dawla captured Baghdad and deposed his younger brother. One of his first acts was to commend Mari to the bishops of the Church of the East as their next patriarch. The bishops grumbled, but there was little they could do about it. The metropolitan Giwargis

of Mosul and Erbil, yet again a potential candidate, saw the wisdom of standing aside. Mari's subsequent election, which was conducted under the supervision of one of Sharaf al-Dawla's trusted lieutenants, was a matter of form. As the Christians of Baghdad observed, 'The decision has already been made.'

Sharaf al-Dawla made little trouble for the Christians, and for several years Mari ruled the Church peacefully. According to the historian Mari, he was tall, distinguished, modest and generous, but was too fond of money and outward display and had only a sketchy grasp of theology. Such criticisms were common form, and could have been made about most Nestorian patriarchs. More to the point, Mari was a good administrator and a stern disciplinarian, and showed these gifts to good effect in his treatment of the metropolitan Ibn al-Ghawwas of Damascus, whom he deposed and excommunicated for theft. Mari also did his best to safeguard the interests of the Church during the stormy decade that followed Sharaf's death in 990. Sharaf was succeeded by his brother Baha' al-Dawla in 989, during whose emirate there was a perceptible worsening of relations between Muslims and Christians in the caliphate. According to Bar Hebraeus riots broke out in Baghdad, perhaps in 997, after the Muslim authorities decided to enforce the requirement that Christians should wear distinctive dress. A Christian astronomer in a high government position refused to demean himself, and was able to procure the imprisonment of two 'wicked Arabs' who were tormenting him. The Muslims of Baghdad erupted in fury, and pillaged two Nestorian churches and the monastery of Klilisho^c. They then turned their attentions to the Greek Palace, and Mari was forced to lay out enormous bribes to save the patriarchal residence from destruction. In 999 Mari was summoned before the caliph al-Qadir, who complained that the Christians were making too much noise at prayer and that their churches were surrounded by beggars and vagabonds whose presence was an affront to public decency. The Nestorians of Baghdad, alarmed at this summons, kept vigil outside the caliph's palace while their patriarch was harangued by the commander of the faithful. Everybody believed that Mari would be given an exemplary prison sentence. As it turned out, their fears were unjustified. Mari prudently agreed that the Muslim authorities had a point, and promised to make amends. He left the caliph's palace a free man, and with the usual marks of respect to his office.

The Eleventh-Century Nestorian Patriarchs. Mari died in 1001, a year after thousands of pilgrims from Western Europe had flocked to Jerusalem in the expectation that the millennium would signal the Last Judgement. Since the Syriac-speaking Churches used a calendar based on the Seleucid era, in which dates were reckoned from the year 312 BC, the Nestorians did not recognise this millennium, and were

unmoved by the prevailing excitement. Educated Nestorian churchmen who had despaired at the credulity of the Frankish pilgrims now found themselves ruled by a patriarch who could not even read. Yohannan V, who reigned for eleven years after the death of Mari, had been like his predecessor both bishop of Shenna and metropolitan of Fars, and owed his election to the intervention of the sultan. A number of bishops, including the metropolitan of Elam, fled rather than accept such an unprepossessing choice, and Yohannan was forced to buy the support of the metropolitan of Beth Garmai with a handsome bribe. This decided the attitude of waverers, and Yohannan was finally consecrated in the presence of thirteen bishops. He took his revenge on his opponents by banishing them from his presence for several months. The metropolitan Isho'yahb of Mosul and Erbil, who had spoken out against his consecration, was forbidden to enter the patriarch's house, but was eventually forgiven after he put on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of penitence.

During Yohannan's reign the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (996–1021), an erratic despot whose edicts became increasingly capricious as his reign progressed, unleashed a fitful persecution against the Jews and Christians of Egypt, Palestine and Syria that lasted for most of the first decade of the eleventh century. The persecution started in 1001, was intensified in 1005, and reached a climax in 1009 with the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. All accounts of the persecution agree that many churches and monasteries were destroyed, and that Jews and Christians were humiliated in petty and spiteful ways. In 1005 al-Hakim ordered the strict enforcement of the laws that required them to wear distinctive clothing. Normally, the 'people of the book' were required to proclaim their inferior status by wearing conspicuously-coloured belts and turbans. On this occasion, according to Mari, the Christians were also ordered to wear a heavy wooden cross around their necks, and the Jews the head of a calf. However patchily applied, these vindictive measures had the desired effect. According to Mari an 'enormous multitude' converted to Islam, 'to the great grief of the others'. The Nestorian bishop of Egypt reported hysterically that 'forty thousand' churches and monasteries had been destroyed in the western regions. This figure is certainly greatly exaggerated, but there is no reason to doubt that the persecution was serious. A reference in the *Chronography* of Eliya of Nisibis, completed in 1018, confirms its demoralising effect. Eliya mentioned that a metropolitan of Damascus had recently fled to Baghdad, 'on account of the storm of persecution which had arisen against the Christians living in the West'.

Al-Hakim's persecution only affected Christians living in the territories of the Fatimid caliphate. In the 'Abbasid caliphate, by contrast, the Christians lived under the relatively mild rule of the caliph al-Qadir (991–1031). In 1002, the

first year of Yohannan V's reign, there was an ugly riot in Baghdad, sparked by the rumour that a Christian official had seduced the wife of a Muslim baker and then murdered her husband. An angry Muslim crowd was incited by a zealous Hanbalite lawyer to attack two Nestorian churches, the Jacobite church of Mar Thomas and a Jacobite nunnery. The attack on the church of Mar Thomas resulted in a tragedy. The excited crowd began destroying the church furnishings and looting its valuables, and in the confusion the church was accidentally set alight. Its roof fell in and fifty people—Christians and Muslims, men, women and children—were killed by its collapse. Three Muslim women were also trampled to death outside the church in the ensuing panic. The incident generated a backlash which its sponsor had not expected. There was a brief wave of sympathy for the Christian minority, and the caliph al-Qadir ordered an official enquiry to be held. Three eminent Muslim lawyers found that the attacks on Christian property had been unlawful, and blamed the Hanbalite fanatic for the tragedy. This welcome verdict was overshadowed by an outbreak of wrangling that followed the discovery of a Gospel, only slightly scorched, in the charred ruins of the church of Mar Thomas. Jacobites, Nestorians and Muslims alike hailed its survival as a miracle, but disagreed as to its significance. For the Jacobites, it was a sign of divine favour; for the Muslims, a reminder of Muhammad's guarantees to the Christians, and therefore a pleasing proof of Islam. The Nestorians ingeniously argued that, like the ram in the thicket in the story of Abraham and Isaac, the heretical church of Mar Thomas had been offered up for sacrifice by God so that their own churches might be spared.

The poor relations between the Nestorians and the Jacobites were dramatised by an attempt by Yohannan V in 1003 to procure the disgrace or execution of the Jacobite maphrian Ignatius bar Qiqi for treason. Ignatius, a noted scholar, visited Baghdad shortly after the riots of 1002 to oversee the restoration of the gutted church of Mar Thomas, and was lionised by the capital's intellectuals, both Muslims and Christians. The maphrian seemed to be in no hurry to return to Tagrit, and the ill-educated Yohannan, jealous of the attention lavished on his rival, forbade Nestorian scholars to attend any more of his salons. The Jacobites persuaded a Muslim notable to demand a public apology by the Nestorian patriarch, which Yohannan refused to give. From then on, the gloves were off. As the maphrians were traditionally consecrated by the Jacobite patriarchs of Antioch and had to venture into Roman territory for this ceremony, Yohannan accused Ignatius of being a Roman spy. The caliph al-Qadir ordered another enquiry into the affairs of his turbulent Christian subjects, which did its best to establish the truth of this allegation. Revealingly, most of the Muslim judges disregarded Yohannan's sworn statement that Ignatius was a spy. They knew the Nestorians too well by

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now to believe such poisonous allegations. They noted that the maphrian had been consecrated on Roman soil, but they also pointed out that the Romans hated and persecuted the Jacobites. Ultimately, they found that Ignatius had no case to answer. But they also insisted that the provisions of the rescript given to the Nestorian patriarch Abraham III (906–37) nearly a century earlier by the caliph al-Muqtadir should be respected. This diploma had granted the Nestorian patriarchs the right to reside permanently at Baghdad. The caliph's response was predictable. Realising that the only way to prevent further disputes was to keep the two Christian leaders apart, he upheld al-Muqtadir's ruling. Only the Nestorian catholicus could live permanently in Baghdad. The Jacobite maphrian was to reside at Tagrit, and if exceptional circumstances required his presence in Baghdad, he was to return to Tagrit as soon as possible. Although the Jacobites pretended that this decision placed both Churches on an equal footing, al-Qadir's verdict was a definite victory for the Nestorians.

Yohannan V died in 1011 and was buried in the church of Asbagh in Baghdad. He was succeeded by Yohannan VI (1012–16). As usual, the election was contested. The favourite was Yohannan bar Nazuk, bishop of Hirta, but he did not enjoy unanimous support, and it was decided that the new patriarch would be selected by lot. Six names were put into the urn, and Yohannan's lot was drawn. According to Mari, the customary range of Muslim humiliations was enforced in full against the Christians during Yohannan's four-year reign. There was 'great affliction', and many of the more worldly Christians of Baghdad converted to Islam to escape harassment. But Mari also mentioned that the caliph al-Qadir intervened in favour of the Christians after one of Baghdad's largest mosques was damaged in an accidental fire. The Muslims believed that the Christians had set the fire, but no evidence of arson was found. 'And when the officials of the caliph al-Qadir learnt the truth of the matter,' Mari continued, 'they prevented the Muslims from carrying out their design of attacking the Christians.' Such nuances need to be kept in mind in any analysis of official Muslim policy towards the Christians. Oppression is a matter of degree. Although the Muslim restrictions were irksome and demoralising, under a conscientious caliph like al-Qadir life remained perceptibly better for the Christians of Iraq than for their counterparts in Egypt.

Yohannan VI died in 1020 and was succeeded as patriarch seven months after his death by Isho'yahb IV (1020–5), previously bishop of Qasr and Nahrawan. Isho'yahb had fled from his diocese during the persecutions of Fakhr al-Mulk and Ibn Jabir in his predecessor's reign, and his property had been confiscated. An unlikely candidate, he secured his election by bribing the civil authorities. According to Bar Hebraeus, he gave 5,000 dinars to the vizier of the sultan Sharaf

al-Dawla, who suppressed any potential opposition. With the support of the vizier, he was duly elected and consecrated. However, the manner of his election was resented by many bishops, who left their dioceses and refused to allow his name to be proclaimed. According to Mari, who was not usually reticent where scandal was concerned, Isho'yahb's short reign of four years and six months was marked by 'disputes and disorders painful to relate and unhelpful to explain'. Presumably the patriarch's instructions were defied by most of his metropolitans and bishops. Disorder even marked his death. Baghdad at this period was the frequent target of bandit raids and in 1025 its western suburb of Karkh was burned down in a particularly bold raid. Isho'yahb IV died in May 1025, and his funeral ceremony had to be held at night for fear that its traditional extravagance might attract unwelcome attention.

The patriarchal throne remained vacant for three years after Isho'yahb's death due to continuing unrest in Baghdad. In 1026 there was fighting in the city between Turkish soldiers and bandit groups, and order was only restored with the entry of Baha al-Dawla's son Jalal into the capital in October 1027. Around this time the Greek Palace was pillaged, and the anarchy of 1026 and 1027 offers the best context for this incident. The bishops finally met to elect a new patriarch in 1028. After the disorders and squabbles of Isho'yahb's reign there was a feeling that a fresh start was needed. Isho'yahb, for whatever reason, had been a ghastly mistake, and for once the election was conducted without any obvious chicanery. The Nestorians of Baghdad observed a three-day period of prayer for a successful outcome. There were three candidates: two bishops and one monk. The favourite was the bishop Eliya of Tirhan, an honest, prudent and deeply studious man. A native of Karka d'Gedan, 'he used to exercise his mind fiercely, and wore himself out reading books and studying various branches of knowledge,' according to Mari. Lots were drawn, to give the credulous commoners the impression that the election was not a foregone conclusion, and Eliya's name duly emerged. He was consecrated in an atmosphere of relief.

Eliya I (1028–49) reigned for nineteen years. He was that rarest and most delightful of birds, a scholar-administrator. Crucially, he made a favourable impression on the Muslim authorities. According to Mari, 'during his reign there was no man more renowned for his learning, and no chief more pleasing to the sultan.' A noted author, several of whose works have survived, Eliya encouraged a movement to codify the canon law of the Church of the East. It is probably no coincidence that two of the greatest Nestorian writers of the eleventh century, Eliya bar Shinaya and 'Abdallah ibn al-Tayyib, flourished under his patronage. Eliya bar Shinaya was metropolitan of Nisibis during Eliya's reign, and the two men quarrelled for several years. The patriarch pursued a long correspondence with

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his insubordinate metropolitan, but eventually agreed to meet him in a monastery near Erbil. There, they recognised one another's quality and were reconciled. On his return to Baghdad, the patriarch told his intimates that he would never again lose Eliya's confidence. Towards the end of his reign Eliya was afflicted by a paralysis of his limbs, and was confined to bed. He died in 1049, after giving the Church of the East a welcome period of stability.

Eliya's successor, the bishop Yohannan bar Targhal of Qasr and Nahrawan, was elected in December 1049 after a seven-month vacancy in the patriarchate. Yohannan VII (1049–57), a native of Baghdad and the last patriarch of that name for five centuries, lived through the death-throes of the Buyid dynasty. He had to wait until the summer of 1050 before he was able to celebrate his consecration, as Baghdad was paralysed by street clashes between the Sunni Muslim supporters of the Seljuqs and their Shi'ite opponents. Four years later, in the spring of 1054, the Turkish mercenaries in Baghdad revolted because they had not been paid and sacked the city's Christian quarter, wrecking the Greek Palace and the nearby church of Asbagh. Their main target was the house of Abu'l-Hasan 'Ubad, the Christian vizier of the Turkish emir al-Basasiri, who controlled the purse strings, but once the rioting began it soon got out of hand. In December 1055, at the invitation of the caliph al-Qa'im, the Seljuq commander Toghrul Beg entered Baghdad with a Turkish army from Khorasan, and camped near the Christian quarter. The Turkish and Dailamite soldiers in the capital still loyal to the Buyids promptly revolted against al-Basasiri. The Greek Palace, which had just been restored by Abu'l-Hasan 'Ubad, was again pillaged during the ensuing street fighting. Yohannan took refuge for several weeks in the monastery of Dorqoni, returning to Baghdad only after the violence subsided. He fell ill and died in the summer of 1057.

The election of Yohannan's successor was delayed by the vicissitudes of the civil war that ensued between Toghrul Beg, the first sultan of the Seljuq dynasty, and the Turkish emir al-Basasiri. The two main candidates were Emmanuel, metropolitan of Beth Garmai, and Sabrisho^c Zanbur, metropolitan of Elam. Sabrisho^c had a powerful supporter at court, the physician Reja, and without bothering to secure a party within the Church itself went directly to Toghrul Beg at Ispahan to seek his consent for his election. Both sultan and caliph assented, and armed with their authority Sabrisho^c eventually prevailed, though his consecration was delayed for several years because a number of bishops demanded that a proper patriarchal election should be held. Finally, after much wrangling, Sabrisho^c was duly elected and consecrated in 1063, six years after his predecessor's death. He proved to be an efficient patriarch, who was remembered for consecrating a large number of metropolitans and bishops. Besides filling a

number of vacant dioceses in Mesopotamia whose metropolitans or bishops had died during the previous six years, he also consecrated several bishops for dioceses in the exterior provinces. As these latter appointments demonstrate, he was anxious to extend the missionary role of the Nestorian Church. For the western provinces he consecrated a metropolitan for Egypt and bishops for Jerusalem and Aleppo. He also consecrated a bishop for the remote island of Soqotra, one of the few suffragan dioceses left in the province of Fars. Two other appointments suggest that he wished to revive the faltering Nestorian missionary presence in China. He consecrated a bishop named Giwargis of Kashkar, who was sent 'to Khorasan and Segestan' but travelled on to the territory of the Kara Khitai in Chinese Turkestan, where he remained for the rest of his life. He also sent the metropolitan Hnanisho^c of Jerusalem on a visitation to the 'Islands of the Seas', probably the East Indies. Sabrisho^c suffered a stroke in 1072, the eleventh year of his reign, and died four months later.

Sabrisho^c III was succeeded by ʿAbdisho^c II ibn al-ʿArid (1074–90) of Mosul, metropolitan of Nisibis. ʿAbdisho^c's election in 1072 was relatively uncontroversial, but he had to wait for two years before he could be consecrated. He lived in Maiperqat, a far more agreeable residence at this period than decaying Nisibis, and was unable to make his way immediately to the ʿAbbasid capital because the roads were blocked by the Turks and Maiperqat itself was under siege. A few months later, after the siege had been lifted, he managed to reach Baghdad, only to find that the Tigris had overflowed its banks and that the capital had been devastated by flooding. Many people died during this natural disaster, and for a brief moment it brought Baghdad's Muslims and Christians together. The caliph al-Qa'im had to be carried by a burly attendant from his flooded bedroom, and although the waters halted two hundred yards away from the Greek Palace, the Nestorians spent their days in prayer and their nights in vigil in the patriarchal church of Mart Maryam. The flood eventually receded, and after the damage was put to rights the new patriarch was consecrated in the traditional manner. Mari, who devoted sixteen pages of his history to ʿAbdisho^c's election and consecration, said not a word about his reign, perhaps because his subject was quietly competent and gave no grounds for gossip. Such, at least, might be inferred by Sliba's remark that he was 'elderly, honest and scholarly, and all were satisfied with his government'. But however orderly ʿAbdisho^c's own existence might have been in Baghdad, two incidents during his reign indicate that Muslim pressure on the Christians of central and southern Mesopotamia was increasing. In the 1070s and 1080s there were several serious clashes between the Christians and Muslims of Tagrit, and Turkish troops were eventually sent to the town to sort out the city's unruly Jacobites. Order was restored brutally, and the surviving Christians fled into the

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countryside. The Jacobite maphrian hastily decamped to Mosul, and neither he nor his successors ever resided again in the historic cradle of the Jacobite Church in Iraq. Further to the south, in Beth Aramaye, the Nestorian monastery of Mar Sabrisho^c in Wasit was converted into a mosque. ‘Abdisho^c’s diploma from the caliph al-Qa’im, couched in terms that were by now traditional, had promised that no harm would come to the Christians or to their churches, monasteries, chapels and cemeteries. These well-worn phrases were beginning to look a little threadbare.

The Twelfth-Century Nestorian Patriarchs. ‘Abdisho^c II died after a reign of fifteen years, and was succeeded by Makkikha I (1091–1110), who had earlier been bishop of Tīrhan and was metropolitan of Mosul and Erbil at the time of his election. For once, the succession was uncontested, and Makkikha was elected unanimously. It is not hard to see why. He was an accomplished physician and a pious and well-read theologian and biblical scholar. Also, unusually for a Nestorian patriarch, he was honest. Mari remarked that, although he was not a rich man, he had governed the province of Mosul like ‘the best of shepherds’, and had taken no money from the bishops he consecrated. His reign as patriarch was less happy. The caliph’s doctor Abu’l-Faraj Sa’id ibn Ibrahim al-Wasiti, a Nestorian priest, had smoothed the way for his appointment, and he attempted to influence Makkikha’s policies after he became patriarch. Makkikha had no intention of submitting to Ibn al-Wasiti’s guidance, and clashed with his former protector on several occasions. The final showdown between the two men came when Makkikha reversed the custom instituted by ‘Abdisho^c I over a century earlier, that the Lord’s Prayer should be sung in unison by both priest and people. He did so, no doubt, to stress his distaste for a practice borrowed from the Jacobites, but his ruling shocked a number of traditionalists. Ibn al-Wasiti protested vigorously, and Makkikha excommunicated him. ‘Amid al-Dawla, the vizier of the caliph al-Mustazhir (1094–1118) remonstrated with the patriarch at this harsh treatment of his master’s loyal servant, hoping that he would relent, but Makkikha boldly insisted on his prerogatives. ‘Even if you exile me from your country,’ he said, ‘you cannot change what I have bound and loosed. I hold my authority not from your letter of appointment, but from heaven. Your authority may extend for two hundred *farsangs*, but mine stretches from the East to the West. Whether I am near or far, this rebel cannot pray without mentioning my name.’ The vizier reported Makkikha’s defiance to the caliph, ‘without omitting a single word’, and al-Mustazhir gave way. Impressed by Makkikha’s honesty and courage, he ordered Ibn al-Wasiti to submit to the patriarch’s authority. Ibn al-Wasiti later came to a bad end. Excommunicated by the patriarch, he was also struck blind in response to Makkikha’s prayers. Such, at least, is the story preserved by Mari, who heard it from a priest who knew Ibn al-Wasiti.

In 1099, during Makkikha's reign, Jerusalem was captured by the Crusaders. The news was received in Baghdad with grief and anger. 'The whole city wept', and the imams in the mosques preached a holy war against the infidel. To the credit of the Muslims, there were no attacks on the caliphate's Christian minority. Fighting in Syria and Palestine between the Muslims and the Crusaders continued throughout the twelfth century, but with rare exceptions the vicissitudes of the Crusades had little effect on the lives of Christians in the caliphate. The Muslims sensibly distinguished between the Franks in Palestine and the Syrian Christians who had lived for centuries under Muslim rule. This tolerant attitude persisted well into the thirteenth century. It only finally broke down under the devastating onslaught of the Mongols in the 1250s, because the Christians openly celebrated Muslim defeats.

Makkikha I died in 1110, after facing down a plot to unseat him and consecrate the metropolitan Isho'yahb ibn al-Hammad of Nisibis patriarch in his stead. He was succeeded a year later by the patriarch Eliya II ibn al-Moqli (1111–32). Eliya was a native of Mosul, and was metropolitan of Mosul and Erbil at the time of his election, which seems to have been uncontroversial. Frustratingly little is known of Eliya's reign, as Mari confined his account of his patriarchate to a description of his consecration ceremony, which was conducted with the usual pomp and ceremony, and a list of the bishops who were either present at the ceremony or were consecrated by the patriarch during his reign. Other Christian sources assert merely that Eliya governed the Church 'fairly and justly'. Muslim sources record that the young sultan Mahmud II squeezed the Christians for money in 1121 by threatening them with the strict application of the laws of restriction. This tactic, which would be used repeatedly by the Muslim authorities for the next nine centuries, proved eminently successful. The *dhimmis* bought themselves off with a present of 20,000 dinars, a quarter of which the sultan generously remitted to the caliph al-Mustarshid.

Eliya II died in 1132, and was succeeded in August 1134 by the elderly ascetic Bar Sawma, bishop of Tamanon. Bar Sawma, a native of the village of al-Zaidiya near Nisibis, came from a good family, but his father died when he was only ten years old, leaving an estate heavily in debt. A Greek monk who had once worked for Bar Sawma's father took pity on the young and penniless orphan, and arranged for him to enter one of the Nisibis monasteries. Bar Sawma studied hard, and eventually found a job writing letters in Syriac and Arabic for the metropolitan of Nisibis. He was a pious and charitable man, but also careful with his money, and his sound administration of the diocese of Tamanon was widely praised. He was urged to compete in the patriarchal election of 1134 by the metropolitan of Nisibis, who took the precaution of

taking three of his bishops to Baghdad to lobby for him. Remarkably, Bar Sawma was elected without opposition. However, he sat for less than two years in the Greek Palace, and during his brief reign the patriarchal residence was pillaged by Arab plunderers. Its precious collection of Syriac and Arabic books and all its furniture were carried off, after the patriarch was unable to find the money to ransom them. Bar Sawma never recovered from the shock of this tragedy. He prayed for an early death, and reminisced constantly about the happy time he had spent as bishop of Tamanon. He spent the rest of his life closeted in a church in the Greek Palace, where he died suddenly in January 1136. According to Mari he suffered a bout of rheumatism, which went straight to his chest and rapidly worsened. According to Bar Hebraeus, he died of fright after walking in his garden and coming unexpectedly upon a snake. Both historians agreed that God had given him the early death he had sought.

Bar Sawma was succeeded in 1139 by ‘Abdisho’ III Ibn al-Muqli (1139–49), formerly metropolitan of Beth Garmai. The bishops could not agree on Bar Sawma’s successor, and ‘Abdisho’ owed his appointment to the intervention of the caliph’s vizier Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Ibn Tarad al-Zainabi. ‘Abdisho’’s investiture by the civil authorities was ‘a famous day’ for the Nestorians. The new patriarch was summoned to the caliph’s palace, where he received his diploma and robe of office from the vizier’s own hands. These unprecedented marks of honour must have galled Baghdad’s Jacobites and Melkites. ‘Abdisho’’s ten-year reign was relatively quiet, and he was praised by Mari for his progressive management of the Greek Palace’s extensive land holdings. ‘He added some beautiful mills to it, and spent vast sums of money on planting an enormous vineyard on the surrounding estates.’ This would have been a profitable speculation. The demand for wine was not restricted to the caliphate’s Jews and Christians. Many Muslims also enjoyed drinking wine, though because of the Qur’an’s strictures against alcohol they had to indulge their tastes discreetly, preferably within the walls of a Christian monastery. The production and supply of wine was mostly in the hands of the Christians, and monasteries in Iraq and Persia were famed for the delightful variety of refreshments they offered to Muslim visitors. ‘Abdisho’ was clearly onto a good thing, and it is probably significant that Mari also criticised the patriarch’s avarice and love of luxury. It seems that this far-sighted entrepreneur could not keep his hands off money, and ‘never let any go out, even when he ought to have spent it on the needy and the poor.’ ‘Abdisho’ was paralysed by a severe stroke in the ninth year of his reign, and lingered for several months before he died, conscious but unable to speak. For Mari, the stroke was a divine judgement on the patriarch’s selfishness.

Mari’s narrative, tantalisingly, ends with the death of ‘Abdisho’ III, and the historian must rely on the few details given by Bar Hebraeus and the fourteenth-

century Nestorian writers ʿAmr and Sliba for the careers of his immediate successors. ʿAbdishoʿ III was succeeded by the elderly patriarch Ishoʿyahb V ibn al-Hayik (1149–75), previously bishop of Gazarta, a popular candidate who clinched his election with a bribe of 5,000 dinars to ensure the support of Abu Mansur, the chief physician of the caliph al-Muqtafi. Immediately after his enthronement Ishoʿyahb consecrated nine metropolitans and as many as forty bishops. Several bishops, no doubt, had died during the final months of ʿAbdishoʿ III, when he was physically incapable of consecrating their successors; but it says little for the quality of the deceased patriarch's administration that he had allowed as many as nine archdioceses to fall vacant during his reign without doing anything about it. Ishoʿyahb V reigned for twenty-six years, dying in his ninetieth year in 1175. Little is known about the events of his reign, but one incident seems to have made a great impression on the Christians of the Mosul region. In 1162 a number of Arab soldiers taken prisoner by Georgian Crusaders were ransomed and escorted back to Mosul by their captors. The Georgians rode through the streets of Mosul displaying crosses on the heads of their lances. Never before had the cross been so exalted in a Muslim city. In a contemporary sculpture in the Jacobite monastery of Mar Behnam near Mosul, the warrior saint Behnam was depicted as a Crusader and, like the Georgians, carried a lance tipped with a cross.

The sight of the Georgian Crusaders, according to Bar Hebraeus, 'gave great comfort to the Christians'. Only nine years later, disaster struck the Christians of the Mosul and Hakkari regions. In 1171 a Turkish army advanced against Mosul. Knowing the marauding habits of the Turks, the Jacobites of the Mosul plain villages hastily stored all their possessions in the fortified monastery of Mar Mattai for safekeeping. Unfortunately, the prospect of so much portable booty conveniently concentrated in one place presented an irresistible temptation to the Kurds of the ʿAmadiya region, who made a surprise night attack on the Jacobite monastery. The monks beat off their first rush, and on the following day the Jacobites of Beth Sahraye and other nearby villages came to the rescue, attacked the Kurds and put them to flight. The monks of Mar Mattai then bought the Kurds off with a substantial bribe, and a deceptive calm returned. A few weeks later, however, the Kurds came back in force and assaulted the monastery a second time. This time they were more successful. They breached the monastery's outer wall by rolling a large boulder down upon it, broke in, forced the defenders to take refuge in the monastery's 'upper citadel', and made off with all the loot they could carry. The governor of Mosul sent troops in hot pursuit, and the Kurds were caught and scattered. According to Bar Hebraeus, 'the weaker ones perished by the edge of the sword, while the stronger fled and made their way into the mountain, and attacked forty villages of the Nestorians. They carried off the

women, killed the boys and the men, and burned the houses.' The reference to 'the mountain' is tantalisingly vague, but the most natural interpretation is that the Kurds retreated up the valley of the Great Zab, and that the 'forty villages of the Nestorians' were to be found in the Berwari and Tiyyari districts. It used to be believed that the Hakkari region was only settled in force by the Nestorians at the end of the fourteenth century, but this passage provides important evidence that the Nestorians were already established in Hakkari in large numbers as early as the Seljuq period. The Kurdish attack in 1171 was overlooked by the fourteenth-century Nestorian writers 'Amr and Sliba, because their focus was firmly fixed on events in Baghdad, but it may well have been as devastating as Badr Khan Beg's more famous attack on the Nestorians of the Tiyyari and Tkhuma districts in the 1840s.

Isho'yahb V was succeeded by Eliya III Abu Halim (1176–90), a scholarly and devout man who was metropolitan of Nisibis at the time of his election. Eliya was fluent in both Arabic and Syriac, and devoted much of his time to the study of philosophy and theology. A number of his sermons and letters were still extant a century later, and were noted by 'Abdisho' of Nisibis in his famous catalogue of Nestorian literature. According to Bar Hebraeus, he spruced up the Greek Palace, which had still not been restored after its sack forty years previously, and made it habitable again. Uneventful in itself, Eliya's reign was probably remembered by most Nestorian Christians in the caliphate for the collapse of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the wake of Saladin's great victory at Hattin in 1187. Although Tyre and a few other northern coastal cities in Palestine held out against the victorious Muslims, most of the Frankish territories in Palestine were overrun. Jerusalem itself was surrendered after a brief siege, and although its loss triggered the Third Crusade, the city remained in Muslim hands despite strenuous efforts by the Crusaders to recover it. The crusade was crippled by disunity and misfortune, and although Acre was retaken and a precarious Christian hold on Palestine's coastal plain restored under the vigorous leadership of the English king Richard Coeur de Lion, enthusiasm among the Christians for further fighting waned after his departure for England in 1191. Although Acre would remain in Christian hands for the next hundred years, the loss of Jerusalem was a heavy blow to the morale of Christians in the caliphate, and Eliya III, who died in 1190, may have witnessed the arrival in Baghdad of an embassy from Saladin in the previous summer. The caliph al-Nasir had recently abdicated in favour of his son, and Saladin's ambassadors presented impressive trophies to the new commander of the faithful, including a cross taken from the Dome of the Rock after the fall of Jerusalem and the crown of the Latin kings of Jerusalem. The ambassadors were accompanied by a number of noble Frankish prisoners, who

were forced to march into Baghdad with their banners reversed, in token of humiliation and submission. The crowds which witnessed this event must have included many Nestorian Christians.

Eliya was succeeded in 1190 by Yahballaha II bar Qayyoma (1190–1222), previously metropolitan of Nisibis. Yahballaha was unpopular with both the bishops and the people, and lesser men might have been deterred from standing for election. Yahballaha, however, was ‘a very daring man’. He hastened to Baghdad, secured the support of the city’s governor with a bribe of 7,000 dinars, and was duly elected. He seems to have been an able patriarch, as he was described as ‘chaste, intelligent, good at winning friends and influencing people, and well-placed with the rulers’. These seem such admirable qualities in a patriarch that it is hard to account for the opposition to his election. His long reign was remembered by the fourteenth-century historian Sliba as a period of tranquillity for the Christians of the caliphate, marred only by the execution in 1207 of the Christian governor of Daquqa in Beth Garmai on the charge of poisoning his predecessor. Sliba claimed the victim as a Christian martyr, but there is no evidence that the Muslim authorities were unduly influenced by his religion. During his reign Yahballaha II left the Greek Palace, the traditional residence of the Nestorian patriarchs, and installed himself in the church of Mart Maryam in the Karkh quarter of Baghdad, on the western bank of the Tigris.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

Patriarchal Rituals. By the Seljuq period the ritual for the consecration of the Nestorian patriarchs had developed into an almost invariable routine. It involved a series of ceremonies in Baghdad, in the patriarchal monastery in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and in the nearby monastery of Dorqoni. It is clear from the accounts of the twelfth-century historian Mari, who gave detailed descriptions of the consecration ceremonies for the patriarchs Bar Sawma (1134–6) and ‘Abdisho^c III (1139–48), that this programme could be a gruelling ordeal for the participants, as the patriarchs and their attendant bishops were required to travel from one site to the next with little opportunity for rest. The ritual began in Baghdad. After the new patriarch was elected his status was formally confirmed by the caliph. He was first received by one of the caliph’s high officials in his palace, where he was given a letter of appointment, vested in a robe of honour and crowned with a turban. He then mounted a mule (Christians were not allowed to ride horses) and rode to the patriarchal residence, normally but not always the Greek Palace, accompanied by a number of court officials and escorted by a guard of Turkish

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cavalry troopers. The patriarch Mari (987–99) was the first Nestorian catholicus to receive a letter of appointment from the caliph, and his successors made a point of seeking a similar mark of favour. According to the historian Mari, confirmation by the caliph soon came to be considered an important proof of a patriarch's legitimacy.

The texts of several Muslim letters of appointment have survived. Mari quotes the letters given to the patriarchs 'Abdisho' II in 1074 and Makkikha I in 1092, and in 1926 Alphonse Mingana published the text of the letter given to the patriarch 'Abdisho' III in 1139. The letters never became completely formulaic, though the same basic sentiments tended to recur from one reign to the next, and they shed fascinating light on the attitude of the Muslim authorities not only towards the Nestorian Church but also towards the other Christian Churches of the caliphate. The latest surviving example, the letter presented to 'Abdisho' III in 1139 by the caliph al-Muqtafi (1136–60), recognised the Nestorian patriarch as the head of all the Nestorian Christians living in Baghdad and elsewhere in the lands of Islam, and also, revealingly, as the head 'of the Greeks, whether Jacobites or Melkites, who might give them trouble in one country or another'. The Jacobites, most of whom would have indignantly described themselves as Syrians, not Greeks, were lumped in with the pro-Greek Melkites because their maphrians had to go to Antioch, in Byzantine territory, for consecration. The Jacobites and Melkites were both potentially untrustworthy in Muslim eyes, and the caliph, 'the highest imam of Islam', therefore promised to give the Nestorian patriarch a sympathetic hearing if the Nestorians were bullied by their Christian enemies. He also promised to uphold the patriarch's sole right to wear the garments of his office, to vindicate him against anyone who withheld from him his due obedience, and to protect the Christians and recognise their property rights in return for the payment of the poll tax. He concluded by soliciting the patriarch's prayers and appealing for the obedience of the Christians. In theory, these were fine promises. In practice, things were not so simple. The later 'Abbasid caliphs frequently had to adjudicate the disputes that arose between the Nestorians, Melkites and Jacobites, and although a bias towards the Nestorians can sometimes be discerned, their main concern was to preserve or restore the public peace. In most cases, especially if the Christians had begun to riot in Baghdad, they tried to resolve a dispute on its merits, in the hope that a fair judgement might calm down their hot-headed subjects. Certainly, their decisions did not always favour the Nestorians.

The involvement of the civil authorities in the consecration ceremonies of a Nestorian patriarch usually ended after the procession to the patriarchal residence. Thereafter, the ceremonies were an affair for the Church. The first step was a church service in the patriarchal church (successively Mart Maryam in the

Greek Palace, Mar Sabrisho^c in the Suq al-Thalatha quarter and Mart Maryam in the Karkh quarter), in which the 'guardian of the throne' celebrated the liturgy, read the gospel and proclaimed the new patriarch's name. The patriarch and his assembled metropolitans and bishops then left Baghdad in the late afternoon and rode during the cool of the evening to the patriarchal monastery near the crumbling ruins of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the former patriarchal seat. They were accompanied by a large crowd of Christians from the capital, who walked in procession behind the great men. A service of evensong was held after their arrival, some hours after midnight, and on the following day the patriarch was consecrated in the great church of Kokhe in the patriarchal monastery, normally by the metropolitan of Elam. Then, without pausing for rest, the patriarch and his bishops set off at evening for the monastery of Dorqoni, to pay their respects to the relics of the legendary apostle Mar Mari. The ride took all night, and the monks of the monastery welcomed the exhausted cavalcade by strewing the patriarch's path with branches. He was then required to officiate at yet another church service. He and his drooping escort then rode back to Baghdad, where he made a ceremonial entrance into the Greek Palace, where he would live for the rest of his reign.

An important feature of the consecration ceremony in Seleucia-Ctesiphon was the consecration of a dozen or so bishops by the new patriarch to fill the gaps in the hierarchy that had occurred since the death of his predecessor. As there was sometimes an interregnum of several years between the death of one patriarch and the appointment of his successor, occasionally due to the malice of the Muslim authorities but normally because the Nestorians themselves could not agree on a successor, natural attrition could take a significant toll of the bishops of the interior provinces during these vacancies. The patriarch would also 'perfect' several bishops who had been consecrated by their metropolitans, and ordain a number of priests and deacons.

A ritual also attended the burial of a Nestorian patriarch. Before the patriarchal seat was moved to Baghdad in the third quarter of the eighth century, most of the patriarchs were buried in the monastery of Dorqoni near Seleucia-Ctesiphon, alongside the supposed remains of the apostle Mari. This custom changed on the death of Timothy I (780–823), who was buried in the monastery of Klilisho^c near Baghdad. Timothy's seven immediate successors were also buried in the monastery of Klilisho^c, but this practice came to an end in the reign of the patriarch Yohannan II (884–92), after the monastery was pillaged by a Muslim mob and the corpse of the recently-buried patriarch Enosh was exhumed and maltreated. Yohannan spent the final years of his life in the church of Asbagh in the al-Shammasiya quarter of Baghdad, on the eastern bank of the

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Tigris, and his body was buried there. His successor Yohannan III (893–9) bought the nearby Greek Palace as a patriarchal residence, and lived, died and was buried there. His successor Abraham II (906–37), for some unknown reason, was buried not in Baghdad but in the monastery of ʿAbdon, between Samarra and Baghdad. Thereafter it became customary for the Nestorian patriarchs to be interred in the Greek Palace, which contained several churches and chapels and plenty of space for patriarchal burials. Emmanuel I (937–60) and his twelve successors, up to and including Eliya II (1111–32), were all buried in the patriarchal church of Mart Maryam in the Greek Palace. This custom came to an end in the reign of the patriarch Bar Sawma (1134–6), who left al-Shammasiya and the much-pillaged Greek Palace for the slightly safer confines of the Suq al-Thalatha quarter further to the south. Although the Greek Palace remained intermittently in use thereafter, depending on the whim of individual patriarchs, Bar Sawma and his three twelfth-century successors were all buried in the church of Mar Sabrisho^c in Suq al-Thalatha. Yahballaha II (1190–1222) set a new fashion for the first half of the thirteenth century. He and his successors Sabrisho^c IV (1222–4) and Sabrisho^c V (1226–56) were buried in the church of Mart Maryam in Baghdad's Karkh quarter, on the western bank of the Tigris.

At the same time as they formalised their relationship with the Seljuq sultans, the Nestorian patriarchs also entered into official relations with the Jacobite Church. The bitter sectarian clashes that had marked the last half-century of Sasanian rule gradually came to an end after the Arab conquest. In effect, the contest between the Nestorians and the Jacobites was halted by the Arabs before either Church could claim an outright victory, and the disputants slowly realised that they would have to be content with a draw. In any case, life under Muslim rule altered their perspectives, though perhaps not as much as has sometimes been claimed. Both Churches were subject to periodic harassment by the Muslims, and during the ninth and tenth centuries they occasionally stood shoulder to shoulder in times of crisis. Such displays of Christian solidarity were rare, however, and usually short-lived. Both the Nestorian patriarchs and the Jacobite maphrians continued to react violently if they felt that their privileges were being threatened. Nevertheless, although relations between the two Churches could never be described as warm, by the Seljuq period they were grudgingly prepared to acknowledge each other's existence, provided that no attempt was made to disturb the status quo. By the twelfth century it had become customary for the Jacobite maphrians to go to Baghdad after their consecration for a ceremony of investiture at the hands of the Nestorian patriarch, who presented them with a chasuble, a cope and a staff. The ceremony was almost certainly instituted at the request of the 'Easterners', the Jacobites who lived alongside the Nestorians in

the formerly-Persian territories of northern Mesopotamia. Relations between the Jacobite patriarchs of Antioch and the maphrians of Tagrit at this period were often tense, and the participation of the Nestorian patriarchs in a ceremony of investiture asserted the dignity of the 'Easterners' against the interfering 'Westerners'. The Nestorian patriarchs derived their legitimacy from the sultan's confirmation, and their *imprimatur* in turn legitimised the Jacobite maphrians. It also offered the maphrians the prospect of enlisting the civil authorities on their side in the event of disputes with the Jacobite patriarchs. It is not clear when the first investiture was held. Bar Hebraeus mentioned that the patriarch 'Abdisho' III (1139–49) invested the maphrian Dionysius Mushe in 1142 'according to custom', implying that at least one of Dionysius's predecessors had been given similar treatment. Several later instances are also mentioned by Bar Hebraeus, and he himself was invested by the Nestorian patriarch Makkikha II (1257–65) after his consecration as maphrian in 1264. The ceremony seems to have fallen into disuse once the Nestorian patriarchs were driven from Baghdad at the end of the thirteenth century, but memories of its significance lingered on for several more decades. As late as 1364 the Jacobite bishop Dioscorus bar Kaina thought it worthwhile to buy the endorsement of the Nestorian patriarch Denha II (1336/7–1381/2) of his candidature for the office of maphrian.

The Mesopotamian Provinces. After several centuries of deceptive stability, Nestorian Christianity entered into a deep decline in the southern Mesopotamian provinces and in Persia during the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. The experience of the Christian population of the Persian city of Qum was typical of a quiet process of conversion and emigration that was taking place all over the caliphate. Qum had been a middle-ranking Sasanian city, and doubtless had a Christian minority well before the Arab conquest, but the presence of Christians in the city is first attested in Arab tax records of the seventh century, as members of a subject *dhimmi* liable to pay the poll tax. Most, if not all, of these Christians were Nestorians, and they came under the jurisdiction of the Nestorian metropolitans of Rai. Qum enjoyed only modest prosperity during the first three centuries of Arab rule, but became an important Muslim shrine city after Fatima, the sister of the eighth Shi'a imam, died there in 817. Despite the city's new significance in Muslim eyes, a significant Christian minority persisted there for at least a century longer, as Christians were still paying *jizyah* in the tenth century. By the eleventh century, there were no Christian taxpayers left in Qum. There is no evidence to suggest that the Muslims drove out the infidels from their holy city, though they were probably made to feel unwelcome in various ways. Rather, Christianity in the city declined gradually between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, as Christians

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either converted to Islam or (more probably) left Qum for a more congenial environment elsewhere.

In the province of the patriarch the diocese of Hirta, whose Christian 'devotees' had for so long prosecuted their feud with the Nestorians of Kashkar, came to an end in the eleventh century. At the same time, four other dioceses were combined into two: Nifr and Nil with Zabe, and Beth Waziq with Shenna d'Beth Ramman. By now the bishops of Kashkar sat in neighbouring Wasit, a city founded in the eighth century by the persecuting Muslim governor al-Hajjaj, and the name Wasit occasionally appears in the titles of the tenth- and eleventh-century bishops of Kashkar. Three more dioceses ceased to exist in the twelfth century. The dioceses of Piroz Shabur (Anbar) and Qasr and Nahrawan are last mentioned in 1111, when their bishops were present at the consecration of the patriarch Eliya II. The senior diocese of Kashkar is last mentioned in 1176, when the patriarch Eliya III transferred the bishop Sabrisho^c of Qaimar to Kashkar. Only the dioceses of Tirhan, 'Ukbara, Zabe, Beth Waziq and Radhan still seem to have been functioning at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and these dioceses too were probably in decline. The Christians of the former 'Abbasid capital of Samarra were included in the Nestorian diocese of Tirhan, and towards the end of the eleventh century, according to a story told by Mari, stones were taken from a Christian church in Samarra and used to build a mosque. By the patriarchal election of 1222 the guardianship of the vacant patriarchal throne, the traditional privilege of the bishop of Kashkar, had passed to the metropolitans of Elam. Evidently the diocese of Kashkar had by now ceased to exist.

The metropolitans of Elam continued to sit uneventfully at Jundishapur throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but the province lost two of its four remaining suffragan dioceses during this period. The diocese of Hormizd Ardashir (Ahwaz) is last mentioned in 1012, when its bishop Emmanuel was appointed metropolitan of Elam by the patriarch Yohannan VI, and the diocese of Ispahan is last mentioned in 1111, when its bishop 'Abdisho^c was present at the consecration of the patriarch Eliya II. Only the dioceses of Susa and Shushter definitely survived into the thirteenth century. The suppression of these two traditional dioceses almost certainly reflects a quiet migration of insecure Christians to the Church of the East's heartland in northern Mesopotamia. The literary sources for the Seljuq period make little mention of the remaining Nestorian communities in Beth Huzaye, except to notice the plunder of the province's Christians by Sharaf al-Din in 986, and it seems likely that the few monasteries still in existence after the Arab conquest were also abandoned at around this time.

The province of Maishan seems to have come to an end in the first half of the thirteenth century. The archdiocese of Basra is last mentioned in 1222, when its

metropolitan Shlemun of Akhlāt, author of the *Book of the Bee*, was present at the consecration of the patriarch Sabrisho^c IV. The suffragan dioceses of Nahargur, Karka d'Maishan and Rima probably ceased to exist rather earlier. The diocese of Nahargur is last mentioned at the end of the ninth century in the list of Eliya of Damascus, and by then it had been transferred to the province of the patriarch. The last-known bishop of Karka d'Maishan, Abraham, was present at the synod held by Yohannan IV shortly after his election in 900, and an unnamed bishop of 'Nahr al-Dayr' (Rima) attended the consecration of Eliya I in Baghdad in 1028. At the beginning of the eleventh century Najran, the sole surviving Nestorian diocese in Arabia, was included in the province of Maishan. Like the province's other suffragan dioceses, it doubtless lapsed well before the Mongol period. The historian Mari mentioned that the monastery of Mar Yohannan of Dailam in Ubullah was still functioning in the first half of the twelfth century, but there are no later references to Christians in Ubullah.

By contrast, the metropolitan province of Nisibis flourished during the Seljuq period, as it was a beneficiary of the influx of Nestorian Christians from Beth Aramaye, Beth Huzaye and Maishan. Its five traditional suffragan dioceses (Arzun, Beth Zabdai, Qardu, Balad and Shigar) persisted uneventfully into the Mongol period, though a number of title changes reflected the ebb and flow of prosperity in the Nisibis region. By the twelfth century the full name of the diocese of Arzun was 'Arzun and Beth Dlish', suggesting that its bishops were by then residing at Bidlis, not earlier attested as a Nestorian centre. Towards the end of the twelfth century the diocese of Beth Zabdai was renamed Gazarta d'Beth Zabdai, in recognition of the growing importance of the 'Abbasid foundation of Jazira ibn 'Umar, a fortress built on an island in the Tigris twelve kilometres to the southeast of Fenek. Finally, the bishops of Qardu moved their seat from Fenek to the large Nestorian village of Tamanon in the Dusha valley in the eleventh century, and the diocese of Qardu was renamed accordingly. The move to Tamanon, the modern town of Dadar, reflected a substantial influx of Nestorian Christians into the valleys of the Tigris and its subsidiaries between Mosul and Fenek. It was probably at this period that the Nestorians began to exploit the tradition of the Syriac Churches that Noah's Ark had come to rest not on Mount Ararat in Armenia but on Jabal Judi, just to the northeast of Tamanon. By the end of the Seljuq period a flourishing 'monastery of the Ark' was attracting pilgrims to the slopes of Jabal Judi, and Tamanon was at the centre of a group of Nestorian villages that had sprung up around this monastery. The diocese of Armenia (Akhlāt), which had briefly been raised to metropolitan status by Timothy I, was again a suffragan diocese of Nisibis by the middle of the eleventh century. According to Mari, a bishop of Armenia accompanied five bishops from the province of

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Mosul to Baghdad in 1074 for the consecration of the patriarch ʿAbdishoʿ II. If Armenia was not a suffragan diocese of Mosul, as Mari's phrasing implies, it must have been a suffragan diocese of Nisibis. In the first half of the twelfth century the bishops of Akhlāt, whose jurisdiction by now included the towns of Van and Wastan, assumed responsibility for the few remaining Christians in Azerbaijan, in consequence of the suppression of the metropolitan province of Bardaʿa. Two new dioceses were also created in the province of Nisibis, for Qarta and Adarma (between Nisibis and Gazarta) by the eleventh century, and for Qaimar (between Mosul and Akhlāt) by the twelfth century. The last references to these dioceses date from the final decades of the twelfth century, but they may well have both persisted into the Mongol period.

The Nestorians also expanded their presence in western Mesopotamia, in cities that had once been in Roman territory, where they formed compact communities that lived alongside much larger Jacobite, Armenian and Melkite congregations. Unlike the Nestorian communities further to the west, which came under the jurisdiction of the metropolitans of Damascus, the Nestorians of western Mesopotamia were included in the province of Nisibis. The Nestorian diocese of Raqqa, first attested in the eighth century, seems to have come to an end in the eleventh century. It is also doubtful whether the diocese of Reshʿaina in Syria, first attested in the eleventh century but probably founded at least a century earlier, persisted into the Mongol period. The diocese of Reshʿaina is mentioned in a fourteenth-century list of dioceses compiled by ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis, but this list is so full of anachronisms that it cannot reliably be used as evidence. It is far more likely that the diocese of Reshʿaina, like Raqqa, came to an end in the Seljuq period. But there were important gains elsewhere. A Nestorian diocese was established for Maiperqat towards the end of the eleventh century, whose bishops were also responsible for Nestorian congregations in Amid (Diyarbakir) and Mardin and a number of nearby villages. Five centuries later, the sophisticated urban communities of Amid and Mardin would play a decisive role in the establishment of the Chaldean Church.

The province of Mosul and Erbil, which had been governed by a single metropolitan since its establishment by Timothy I, was divided around 1200. The last known metropolitan responsible for both Mosul and Erbil was Tittos, who was appointed by Eliya III (1175–89). Thereafter separate metropolitan bishops for Mosul and for Erbil are recorded in a fairly complete series from 1210 to 1318. At the beginning of the thirteenth century there were at least seven suffragan dioceses in the provinces of Mosul and Erbil: the long-established dioceses of Hdatta, Hnitha and Hebton, Beth Bgash, Beth Dasen, Beth Nuhadra and Marga, and a new diocese for the city of Urmia in Adarbaigan, which in later centuries

would become an important centre of Nestorian Christianity. The diocese of Urmia is first mentioned in 1074, when its bishop attended the consecration of the patriarch ‘Abdisho’ II with three other bishops from the province of Mosul. The bishop Hnanisho’ of Pushtadar, an unlocalised diocese in the province of Mosul, was present at the consecration of Eliya II in 1111, and it seems likely that this diocese was also in the Urmia region. The diocese of Pushtadar is not again mentioned.

There was continuing decline in the province of Beth Garmai. According to the twelfth-century historian Mari, the diocese of Beth Waziq, transferred to the province of the patriarch some centuries earlier, was returned to the jurisdiction of the metropolitans of Beth Garmai during the reign of the patriarch ‘Abdisho’ I (963–86). In return, Beth Garmai lost the otherwise-unattested diocese of ‘al-Qabba’, probably one of the traditional dioceses disguised under an alternative name. The transfer was not permanent, as Beth Waziq was back in the province of the patriarch by the thirteenth century. At the same time Beth Garmai gradually lost its three remaining suffragan dioceses. The diocese of Shahrzur is last mentioned towards the end of the tenth century, when its bishop Abraham was appointed metropolitan of Maishan during the reign of the patriarch Mari (987–99). The diocese of Shahrard is last mentioned in 1019, and the diocese of Hrbath Glal in 1074. By the beginning of the thirteenth century the metropolitan of Beth Garmai, who now sat at Daquqa, was the only remaining bishop in this once-flourishing province.

The Exterior Provinces. The metropolitans of Fars, reduced to obedience by Timothy I towards the end of the eighth century, did not again question the jurisdiction of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. A reasonably complete list of metropolitans of Fars during the Seljuq period has survived, and it shows that bishops were now transferred routinely between Fars and the other provinces. Some of the metropolitans of Fars indeed went on to higher things. Two Nestorian patriarchs, Mari (987–99) and Yohannan V (1000–11), followed the same career path, serving first as bishop of Shenna d’Beth Ramman in the province of Adiabene and then as metropolitan of Fars. Clearly Fars was fully integrated into the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church of the East in the Seljuq period. However, the reconciliation between the thrones of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Rev Ardashir came far too late to make any difference to the fortunes of the Church of the East. After slowly ebbing for three centuries, Christianity declined dramatically in Fars during the tenth and eleventh centuries. As early as the 650s the patriarch Isho’yahb III had complained to the metropolitan Shem’on of Fars that many Christians in Oman had converted to Islam to escape paying tax, even though they had not

been persecuted. Their example was now followed by the remaining Christian communities in Fars itself. The tipping point was reached in the first half of the tenth century, when the geographer Istakhri noted that Zoroastrians were the largest non-Muslim group in Fars, followed by Christians and Jews in that order, and that almost every village had a fire temple. At the end of the tenth century, following a period of highly successful Muslim evangelism in Fars, Christians were said to rank third behind Jews and Zoroastrians. A Muslim mosque in the mainly Zoroastrian town of Kazrun was enlarged twice between 981 and 1033 to accommodate the 24,000 Zoroastrians and Jews who had converted to Islam in the intervening period. Conversions from Christianity had probably taken place on a similar scale. The last-known metropolitan of Rev Ardashir, 'Abdisho', was present at the consecration of the patriarch 'Abdisho' III in 1139, and by then all but one of the eight suffragan dioceses listed by Eliya of Damascus had long since ceased to exist. Only the distant dependency of Soqotra, which received a bishop from the patriarch Sabrisho' III in 1064, survived the collapse of the once-proud metropolitan province of Fars.

At the beginning of the eleventh century the metropolitan province of Hulwan seems to have had suffragan dioceses for Hamadan, Nihawand and Dinawar. The bishop Mari 'the Persian' of Dinawar, who was consecrated metropolitan of Hulwan some years before the completion of Eliya bar Shinaya's *Chronography* in 1018, was probably the last bishop of Dinawar, as according to a list of Nestorian dioceses compiled at the beginning of the eleventh century Hulwan had only two suffragan dioceses, Hamadan and Nihawand. By the end of the eleventh century Hulwan and Hamadan were probably the only surviving centres of Nestorian Christianity in Media, and by then the metropolitans of Hulwan were also responsible for the former metropolitan province of Rai. Around the beginning of the twelfth century the metropolitan diocese of Hulwan was transferred to Hamadan, in consequence of the decline in Hulwan's importance. The last-known bishop of Hulwan and Hamadan, Yohannan, flourished during the reign of Eliya III (1176–90).

The metropolitan province of Barda'a, founded towards the end of the ninth century, was suppressed in the eleventh or early twelfth century. Only two metropolitans of Barda'a are known from the Seljuq period: Eliya, who was consecrated by the patriarch Mari (987–99); and Nestorius, who was consecrated by 'Abdisho' II (1074–90) for the diocese of 'Brah' (probably Barda'a, though Herat has also been suggested). The province of Barda'a did not survive into the thirteenth century. A manuscript note of 1137 mentioned that the archdiocese of Barda'a and Armenia no longer existed, and that the responsibilities of its metropolitans had been undertaken by the bishops of Akhlat in the metropolitan

province of Nisibis. Later in the twelfth century the metropolitans of Nisibis dropped Beth Nahrin (Mesopotamia) from their title and began calling themselves metropolitans of 'Nisibis and Armenia'. This change of title surely reflected the suppression of the province of Barda'a and the concurrent geographical extension of the province of Nisibis into Armenia.

Further to the east, the metropolitan province of Rai, which had covered Tabaristan and several other regions around the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, was suppressed in either the tenth or the eleventh century. The last-known metropolitan of Rai, Mark, was consecrated by the patriarch Yohannan III in 893. A metropolitan bishop named 'Abd al-Masih was present at the consecration of 'Abdisho' II in 1075 as 'metropolitan of Hulwan and Rai', implying that Rai had by then been incorporated into the metropolitan province of Hulwan. According to the list of Nestorian dioceses compiled at the beginning of the eleventh century, the suffragan diocese of 'Gurgan, Bilad al-Jibal and Dailam' in the province of Rai had also been suppressed, 'owing to the disappearance of Christianity in the region'.

While Nestorian Christianity was slowly dying out in southern Mesopotamia, Persia and Armenia, the Church of the East made some spectacular gains in the eleventh century in Central Asia and Mongolia. In 1009, according to Bar Hebraeus, the metropolitan 'Abdisho' of Merv reported to the patriarch Yohannan V that the king of the Kerait had converted to Christianity after the warrior saint Sergius appeared to him in a vision. The patriarch directed him to baptize all of the king's subjects who wished to become Christians. He also exempted the converts from the worst rigours of Christian fasting, recognising that tribesmen who lived on a basic diet of flesh and milk could not be required to drink only water during the long Lent fast. Bar Hebraeus may have erred in placing the conversion of the Kerait as early as 1009, as Mari, his source for this story, did not mention the identity of the converts. Possibly, it has been argued, a minor tribe just to the east of Khorasan was converted to Christianity in this way, and the story was later attached to the Kerait. But if Bar Hebraeus was wrong, he was only out by a few decades. The Kerait, a powerful Mongol-speaking people whose capital was Karakorum, were later to be among the allies of Genghis Khan, and by the middle of the thirteenth century, when they rode to war against the 'Abbasid caliphate alongside the Mongols, they were firmly Christian.

Interestingly, the conversion of the Kerait was associated by Bar Hebraeus with the metropolitan of Merv. At first sight, it seems unlikely that a metropolitan based as far west as Khorasan would be involved with affairs in eastern Turkestan, but there are a number of indications that Merv remained an important base

for Nestorian missions into Central Asia. An eleventh-century list of Nestorian dioceses credited the metropolitan of Merv with twenty-three suffragan bishops, 'whose seats are not mentioned'. Although it is tempting to dismiss this notice as an absurd exaggeration, the list is disconcertingly accurate when its contents can be checked, not only as far as the Mesopotamian provinces are concerned but also in its references to the mission field. It mentions, for example, that the Nestorian metropolitan provinces of Herat and Samarqand were still flourishing at the beginning of the eleventh century, but that they had no suffragan dioceses. This fits in with indications from other sources—Herat, Zarang and Farah had a regular succession of Jacobite bishops during the Seljuq period, and were even more firmly 'under the thumb of the Severans' than they had been in the days of Timothy I—and it is not impossible that the metropolitans of Merv had a score of roving bishops under their charge, responsible for the vast territories between Khorasan and China. Such an arrangement would have made sense. Cosmopolitan Merv, with its Persian amenities and its substantial Christian minority, was a far more attractive base for mission work than Samarqand, and the prospect of an occasional furlough in the metropolis of Khorasan may have helped to reconcile these itinerant bishops to the hardships of life beyond the Oxus. The possibilities open to Nestorian bishops working out of Merv are illustrated in the career of the bishop Giwargis of Kashkar, who was sent to 'Khorasan and Segestan' by the patriarch Sabrisho^c III (1064–72). According to Mari, he travelled on into the territory of 'al-Khita', possibly China but more probably the territory of the Kara Khitai around Kashgar, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Alternatively, perhaps the conversion of the Kerait should be credited to Nestorian missionaries from Samarqand, who were better placed geographically to undertake this kind of initiative. Samarqand remained the seat of a Nestorian metropolitan during the Seljuq period, and two of its eleventh-century metropolitans are known: Abraham, formerly a solitary monk of the monastery of Mar Gabriel near Mosul, who was metropolitan of Samarqand when Eliya bar Shinaya completed his *Chronography* in 1018; and an unnamed metropolitan of Samarqand who wrote to the patriarch Eliya I (1028–49) about menacing Tartar troop movements off to the east. His intelligence was so interesting that it was discussed by the caliph al-Qa'im and his chief ministers.

Besides winning over the Kerait, Nestorian missionaries also succeeded in converting the neighbouring Naiman tribe. Some conversions were also made among the Oirat and the Merkit, who also lived in the vicinity of Lake Baikal. Christians could also be found at this period among the Uighur, whose territories stretched from Almaliq to Tun-huang, and archaeologists have discovered the ruins of a Nestorian monastery in the Uighur country at Bulayiq in the Turfan

oasis. Much further to the east the Onguts, who lived around the great bend in the Yellow River, also accepted Christianity. Some of these conversions may have been encouraged by a major defeat inflicted by the Kara Khitai in 1141 at Qatwan on the Seljuq sultan Sanjar, whose domains were centred on the oasis of Khwarizm. In the wake of their victory the Kara Khitai occupied Samarqand and Bukhara and pushed forward to the river Oxus. To the east of the river, mosques were replaced by Buddhist pagodas and Nestorian churches. The news of this startling, if temporary, check to Muslim ambitions in Asia became distorted and exaggerated as it travelled westwards through the caliphate into the beleaguered Crusader kingdoms in Palestine. In 1145 an envoy from Raymond of Antioch told the court of Pope Eugene III of a mysterious eastern kingdom, ruled by the Christian king 'Prester John', who had recently defeated the Persians and captured Hamadan. This prince was aware of the struggle of the Crusaders against the infidel, and had tried to come to their aid. This confused story clearly originated with the recent exploits of the Kara Khitai, but it also attested to a dim knowledge of the missionary activities of the Nestorian Church in Asia. In later centuries the legend of Prester John developed, grew and ramified. John became the powerful ruler of an eastern kingdom which would eventually deliver Christendom from the Muslims. European explorers sought for this fabled kingdom in India, in Asia, and ultimately in Ethiopia. Until its final removal from the maps in the seventeenth century, it always remained just over the horizon. Once, in the thirteenth-century *Travels* of Marco Polo, fact and fiction intersected. In 1203 Genghis Khan defeated his foster father Toghrul, the Nestorian Christian king of the Kerait. Toghrul bore the suggestive title *wang-khan*, and Marco Polo eagerly identified him with Prester John. The *Travels* gave a long and circumstantial account of the war between Genghis Khan and Prester John. This account, distorted and exaggerated as it was, contained a kernel of fact. Although he was never the priest or king of a mighty Asian empire, Marco Polo's Prester John was a genuine Christian ruler of a considerable Tartar tribe.

A further indication of the success of the Nestorian missions in the region in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the creation of a metropolitan province for Kashgar and Nevaketh (the region of the 'seven streams' to the north of Kashgar) by the patriarch Eliya III (1176–90). Material traces of the Turkish Christians of the region to the south of Lake Balkash have survived in the form of several hundred Nestorian tombstones from two cemeteries unearthed towards the end of the nineteenth century in the villages of Tokmak and Pishpek near Semirechensk. The Syriac inscriptions on these tombstones, ranging from the ninth to the first half of the fourteenth century but predominantly from the thirteenth century, were published by the Russian scholar Daniel Chwolson in

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1890 and 1897. However, Christian gains were also balanced by losses to Islam, which was increasingly making headway in Turkestan. According to Mari, the metropolitan of Merv who announced the conversion of a Turkish tribe to the patriarch Yohannan V in the early years of the eleventh century had also to report that one of his archdeacons had become a Muslim and had converted a church into a mosque.

An abortive attempt was made towards the end of the tenth century to revive the Nestorian mission in China. In 987 the Christian writer Abu'l Faraj met a Nestorian monk in the Arabian city of Najran who had recently returned from China. He had been sent there seven years earlier with five companions by the patriarch 'Abdisho' I (963–86), to 'set in order the affairs of the Church'. According to this monk, 'Christianity was just extinct in China; the native Christians had perished in one way or another; the church which they had used had been destroyed; and there was only one Christian left in the land. Seeing that there was nobody left to whom his ministry could be of any use, this monk returned more quickly than he had set out'. A few Christian graves have been discovered in China with dates from the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, but these are not evidence for the continuation of an organised Nestorian mission in the country. Almost everything, in fact, suggests precisely the opposite: that during the three centuries of the Sung dynasty (960–1279) the Church of the East had no official presence in China. The Sung emperors were far less receptive to outside influences than their T'ang predecessors, and far less welcoming to foreigners.

Little is known about the Nestorian metropolitan province of India during the Seljuq period. Sporadic contact seems to have been maintained between the Saint Thomas Christians and the Mesopotamian heartland of the Church of the East, but it was not always possible for bishops to be sent to India. A manuscript note of 1007, recopied in 1138, mentions that the province of India had been suppressed, 'because it was impossible to reach it'. Clearly the province was later revived, as it was again in full communion with the Church of the East at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Less formal contacts between India and Mesopotamia must also have continued. The Malabar Christians had long asserted that the bones of the apostle Thomas were not in Edessa, as the Edessenes claimed, but in the city of Meliapur on the Coromandel Coast of India. The 'tomb of Saint Thomas' at Meliapur was evidently a flourishing site of pilgrimage during the Seljuq period, as the thirteenth-century Nestorian writer Shlemun of Akhlat, author of the *Book of the Bee*, mentioned the Indian tradition that Saint Thomas had been buried in the Indian city of 'Maluph'. Even if the animosity of the local rulers sometimes prevented the Church of the East from sending bishops to India, the credulous

pilgrims who flocked to Thomas's supposed tomb doubtless included Nestorian Christians from Mesopotamia.

A Nestorian metropolitan province for the East Indies seems to have existed at some point between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. According to Mari, the patriarch Sabrisho^c III (1064–72) despatched the metropolitan Hnanisho^c of Jerusalem on a visitation to 'the Islands of the Seas'. On its own, this reference is not very helpful, as the 'Islands of the Seas' could have been virtually anywhere, but 'Abdisho^c of Nisibis stated at the beginning of the fourteenth century that the full name of the province was 'the Islands of the Seas between Dabag, Sin and Masin'. This information points firmly towards Indonesia. Sin and Masin are well-attested names for northern and southern China respectively, while Dabag seems to have been an alias for Java, implying that Hnanisho^c's province covered at least some of the islands of the East Indies. The name of this province persisted into the sixteenth century, though merely as an antiquarian survival. In 1503 the patriarch Eliya V, in response to the request of a delegation from the Nestorian Christians of Malabar, consecrated a number of bishops 'for India and the Islands of the Seas between Dabag, Sin and Masin'.

In the western provinces, the archdiocese of Damascus may have persisted without interruption into the thirteenth century, as a Nestorian metropolitan of Damascus is said to have been converted to Catholicism by a thirteenth-century Dominican missionary. However, as the last metropolitan of Damascus to be mentioned by the Nestorians themselves, Mark, was consecrated nearly a century and a half earlier, during the reign of the patriarch 'Abdisho^c II (1074–90), it is possible that the archdiocese lapsed in the twelfth century and was later revived. As far as the suffragan dioceses of the province of Damascus are concerned, the patriarch Sabrisho^c III (1064–72) is known to have consecrated the bishops Hnanisho^c for Jerusalem and Ibn Tubah for Aleppo. It is doubtful whether the Nestorian diocese of Tarsus and Melitene survived into the eleventh century, as the cities of Cilicia and Cappadocia were repeatedly pillaged during the tenth-century wars between the Byzantine Empire and the 'Abbasid caliphate. By the middle of the tenth century, according to Bar Hebraeus, Melitene was 'deserted and devastated', and the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus II Phocas (963–9) repopulated the region with Jacobite Christians who were promised protection against Chalcedonian persecution. Bar Hebraeus and other Jacobite authors frequently mention the fortunes of the Jacobite settlements in Cilicia during the Seljuq and Mongol periods, but make no mention of a Nestorian presence in the region. The Nestorian dioceses of Aleppo, Mabbugh and Mopsuestia probably lapsed during the twelfth century, if not earlier, and as far as is known Damascus and Jerusalem were the only western dioceses still in existence in the thirteenth century.

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The Crusades had a direct effect on Nestorian Christians in Jerusalem. The Church of the East had a bishop at Jerusalem at least as early as the ninth century, more for the sake of pilgrims than for permanent residents. The Nestorians probably also felt that, like the rest of Christendom, they ought to have a representative there. Jerusalem became a metropolitan province in 1065, though as far as is known it had no suffragan dioceses. After the city fell to the Crusaders in 1099 the Nestorians and the other Eastern Christians in Jerusalem found that their position under Latin Christian rule was little better than it had been under the Muslims. Four Syrian Christians sat alongside the two Frankish jurors of Jerusalem's Court of the Market, a Crusader institution which heard certain civil cases where the plaintiff and the defendant were of different religions, but this was one of the few cases where the Eastern Christians fared better than Muslims and Jews under Frankish administration. The *jizyah* they had to pay under Muslim rule was replaced by the Frankish *capitatio*, a payment equally indicative of inferior status. Syrian Christians soon discovered that the faith which they shared with the Latins was less important than their alien race and culture. The magnificent renovation by the Crusaders of the old church of the Holy Sepulchre was completed in 1149, and from the moment of its dedication it became the spiritual focus for Christendom. A forest of smaller Catholic and Orthodox churches sprang up around its site, but the Eastern Christian sects were squeezed out to the fringes of the city. The Armenians were restricted to a quarter in the southwest corner of Jerusalem, and the Nestorians and Jacobites were assigned to the lowly Jewish quarter in the northeast corner of the city, near the traditional site of Pontius Pilate's praetorium. The Nestorians were not even able to compete successfully with the Jacobites in Jerusalem. Compared to the handsome Jacobite church of Saint Mary Magdalene, their churches were small and unimposing.

Egypt was a Nestorian diocese, and later a metropolitan province, between the eighth and eleventh centuries. The earliest Nestorian bishops of Egypt, who doubtless sat at Cairo, were suffragans of the province of Damascus, but by the second half of the tenth century Egypt was a separate metropolitan province. The metropolitan of Egypt certainly had one suffragan bishop, who probably sat at Alexandria, but perhaps only one. From the little that is known about the Nestorian presence in Egypt, life was not dull for its bishops. The bishop Yohannan, who flourished in the early decades of the eighth century, was sold into slavery and worked as a camel driver for forty years, eventually escaping to Iraq where he threw himself on the mercy of the bishop Maran-zkha of Hdatta. Another bishop, Shlemun of Zabe, was consecrated for a suffragan diocese in Egypt by the patriarch 'Abdisho' I (963–86) and recalled when it was

discovered that the metropolitan had consecrated his own nominee to the vacant seat. A third bishop, Joseph al-Shirazi, was injured during a riot in 996 in which Christian churches in Egypt were attacked. Unsurprisingly, the main centre of the Nestorian community in Egypt was Cairo. There was a Nestorian monastery south of the city near al-Adawiyah, which was converted into a mosque in the tenth century, and a monastery of Mar Giwargis in the al-Habash district, which was restored early in the twelfth century. This monastery passed into the hands of the Coptic Church in 1181, 'because no Nestorians were left in Egypt, except one or two men'. By that time the metropolitan province of Egypt had probably long since lapsed. The last-known bishop of Egypt was the metropolitan Mark, who attended the consecration of the patriarch Makkikha I in 1092, almost a century earlier. Eleventh-century texts which ascribe to the Nestorians in Egypt two metropolitans, half a dozen bishops, scores of priests and thousands of families are mere fantasies.

MONASTICISM

The 'Upper Monastery' and Its Influence. The impression given by Isho'dnah's *Book of Chastity* is that monasticism in the Church of the East was thriving in the ninth century. Most of the monasteries mentioned by Isho'dnah were, as might be now have been expected, in northern Mesopotamia, in the metropolitan provinces of Mosul and Nisibis, but several monasteries could still be found in southern Mesopotamia. By the tenth century, however, a sense of decline is evident. Several Nestorian monasteries were confiscated by the Muslims in the tenth and eleventh centuries, including the monastery of Mar Qawma near Maiperqat. The celebrated monastery of Beth ʿAbe, which produced so many of the Church of the East's bishops during the age of Timothy I, remained an important seminary for the Church's higher clergy, but is rarely mentioned in other contexts. It was eclipsed during the Seljuq period by the monastery of Mar Gabriel near Mosul, more commonly known as the 'Upper Monastery'. This monastery played an important role in stabilising the Nestorian liturgy. Its own liturgical tradition eventually won wide acceptance, and a large number of Nestorian liturgical manuscripts copied in the Seljuq period adopted 'the rite of the Upper Monastery'. The patriarch ʿAbdisho' I (963–86), whose learning was greatly admired, studied there. Another monastery near Mosul which flourished under the Seljuqs was the monastery of Mar Eliya, also known as Deir Saʿid, on the west bank of the Tigris, which numbered among its superiors the future patriarch Mari bar Tuba (987–9).

The monastic ideal was clearly still vigorous in the Church of the East, as

several works for the use of monks were written during the Seljuq period. In the tenth century ʿAbd-mshiha of Hirta wrote a book of exhortations to monks and a large number of treatises on the ascetic life. The Nestorian monasteries continued to supply the Church of the East with its bishops, metropolitans and patriarchs, and the details given by historians such as Mari suggest that a number of monasteries that have otherwise left little trace in the historical record were of some importance under the Seljuqs. The patriarch Emmanuel I (937–60) was a monk of the monastery of Rabban Joseph near Balad in Beth ʿArbaye, which seems to have been founded at the beginning of the ninth century and abandoned in the fourteenth century. One of the few Nestorian manuscripts to survive from the ninth century was copied at the monastery of Rabban Joseph in 894, by a scribe named Sliba-zkha. The patriarch Israel (961) studied in the monastery of Mar Sabrishoʿ near Wasit, a foundation about which very little is known. The patriarch Yohannan VI (1012–20) was a monk of the monastery of Mar Ishoʿyahb near Dohuk. The latter monastery is mentioned several times in Yohannan bar Kaldun’s near-contemporary *Life of Rabban Joseph Busnaya*, one of the very few specimens of monastic history to survive from the Seljuq period.

The Life of Rabban Joseph Busnaya. The *Life* of Rabban Joseph Busnaya is a precious source for the day-to-day preoccupations of a community of Nestorian monks living in the hills of northern Iraq in the tenth century. It provides almost as much information on the Christian topography of the ʿAmadiya region as Thomas of Marga’s *Book of Governors* does for the ʿAqra region. Rabban Joseph Busnaya, a charismatic monk, flourished in the first half of the tenth century and died in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh in 979, allegedly at the age of a hundred and ten. Yohannan bar Kaldun was one of his disciples, and wrote the *Life* to preserve his master’s memory. The principal scene of Joseph Busnaya’s activity was the Sapna valley near ʿAmadiya, a locality barely mentioned in earlier Nestorian monastic narratives, where he founded a monastery near the village of Inishk. This was a period of frequent Kurdish raids, and the monastery was soon resited on a prominent hill by Rabban ʿAbdishoʿ of Dasen, ‘visible from the whole district, so that when the monks were attacked by robbers, the country folk nearby would hear their cries’. The *Life* mentions contacts between the monastery of Rabban Joseph Busnaya and other monasteries in the vicinity, including those of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh, Mar ʿAbdishoʿ of Kom near the village of Deiri, Mar Abraham of Shamrakh in the hills to the south of Mengeshe, Mar Ishoʿyahb near Qashafir in the Dohuk district, Mar Abraham the Penitent near the modern Muslim village of Pirus, and Mar Qayyoma above the Berwari village of Dure. The monastery of Mar Abraham was described by Yohannan

bar Kaldun as 'raised above all monasteries', and contained 270 monks at this period. Many of the villages of the Sapna plain mentioned in the *Life* were still Christian in the nineteenth century, but mention is also made of several Christian villages which no longer exist (such as Beth Sayyare near Tineh) or which ceased to be Christian long before the nineteenth century (such as Beth Murdani, the modern Muslim village of Bamarni). The *Life of Joseph Busnaya* has not yet been translated into English, but can be read in a French translation made by J B Chabot between 1897 and 1900.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

The Encyclopedic Tendency. During the tenth century Nestorian scholars began to assemble, arrange and codify their knowledge. The writing of expository literature—dictionaries, lexicons and encyclopedias, historical, geographical, ecclesiastical, biblical and linguistic treatises—is not always indicative of a culture that has lost faith in its own future, but it often can be. It certainly seems to have been so in the case of the Nestorians. It can hardly be coincidental that the work of codifying the language, literature and history of the Church of the East began during a period when conversions to Islam were frequent and Christianity was visibly fading out in southern Mesopotamia and Persia. These indications of decline could not be gainsaid, and Nestorian scholars in Baghdad surely sensed that the best days of the Church of the East were already behind it. At any rate, the tenth century saw the beginning of an 'encyclopedic' trend that continued unabated into the fourteenth century, when Syriac literature almost dried up during the disorders of the age.

The two great Nestorian academic writers of the tenth century were Emmanuel bar Shakhare and Hasan Bar Bahlul. Emmanuel bar Shakhare, who was present at the consecration of the patriarch 'Abdisho' I in 963, was a teacher in one of the Mosul monasteries. He was the author of a voluminous work on the six days of creation, the *Hexaemeron*, which was arranged into twenty-eight separate metrical discourses. This work was overshadowed, at least in terms of volume, by the massive Syriac lexicon of Hasan Bar Bahlul. Bar Bahlul, who also flourished during the reign of the patriarch 'Abdisho' I (963–86), excelled in marshalling the work of others. His lexicon took over almost entirely the contents of two lost earlier lexicons, one written at the beginning of the ninth century by Hnanisho' bar Saroshwai, bishop of Hirta, and the other by the celebrated translator Hunain ibn Ishaq (808–73). Its citations from a wide range of Syriac and Arabic sources are still of great value today, and many of them have

been included in modern Syriac dictionaries and lexicons, notably Robert Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus* and Carl Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum*. An edition, in three large volumes, of Bar Bahlul's lexicon was published in Paris between 1886 and 1901 by Rubens Duval. Another long work by Bar Bahlul, the *Book of Signs*, has recently been discovered and published. The *Book of Signs*, a guide to the interpretation of dreams, engaged with a Muslim tradition of oneiromancy that went back to the earliest days of Islam, and was therefore written in Arabic. Another monumental tenth-century achievement was the anonymous *Expositio Officiorum*, an imposing tome divided into seven sections, in which the Nestorian ecclesiastical offices for the Christian year are explained in minute detail. In the eighteenth century Assemani attributed this work to the metropolitan Giwargis of Mosul and Erbil, who ran for office in the patriarchal elections of 961, 963 and 987 and was unsuccessful on each occasion. Sadly, Assemani's identification is now known to be false, so the embittered shade of Giwargis can no longer find solace for the failure of his worldly ambitions in an adventitious literary eminence. The *Expositio Officiorum* is now more cautiously attributed to Anonymous, or to Pseudo-Giwargis of Erbil.

Not all Nestorian literature from the tenth century was as dreary as this. Eliya of Anbar, who was bishop of Piroz Shabur in the reign of the patriarch Abraham III (906–37) and spoiled his chances of succeeding him by offering a concubine to the austere secretary of the caliph al-Radi, wrote a three-volume collection of proverbs and maxims in metre, the *Book of Centuries* (*ktaba d'ma'watha*). This work, which was also encyclopedic in tendency, reflected its author's relaxed approach to religion, and was probably written for the enjoyment of male chauvinist monks. 'If you chance upon a lion which has just eaten a woman, pray that it is a creature of habit,' runs one maxim. Eliya's collection is not without a certain ponderous charm, though it is unlikely to appeal to the politically correct. The German scholar Andreas Juckel is presently preparing a comprehensive edition of the *Book of Centuries*, which ought to win this curious and somewhat neglected book more readers.

Eliya bar Shinaya and His Contemporaries. The most remarkable Nestorian writer of the eleventh century was undoubtedly Eliya bar Shinaya (975–1049). Appointed metropolitan of Nisibis in 1008 after serving as bishop of Beth Nuhadra for six years, he occupied the archdiocese of Nisibis for forty-one years until his death in 1049. He was the author of a Syriac grammar, hymns, metrical homilies, letters and a collection of canonical decisions. His most important book was the *Chronography*, written in 1019, a two-part work written in parallel columns in Syriac and Arabic. The first part was a chronicle covering the years from 645 to 1018, and the second a treatise on the various calendars in use in Iraq in his day (notably the Seleucid,

Christian and Muslim eras), with concordance tables between them. Eliya put his theory into practice in his chronicle, in which he achieved a higher degree of accuracy than any of his Jacobite rivals had managed. The *Chronography* covered the reigns of around thirty Nestorian patriarchs. In most cases it assigned exact dates for their reigns, and is a crucial primary source for three and a half centuries of the history of the Church of the East. It is available in a Latin version, but has not yet been translated into English. Eliya also wrote an Arabic commentary on difficult passages in the Bible, and was active in the field of apologetics. He wrote two books aimed at Muslims, one explaining how Nestorian beliefs differed from those of other Churches and the other making a wider defence of the Christian faith, explaining the doctrine of the Trinity and stressing that, contrary to Muslim popular belief, Christians too believed in one God. One of the most interesting of his apologetic works, the *Conference* (*kitab al-majalis*) was couched in the form of a debate with the vizier Abu'l-Qasim al-Maghribi in Nisibis in 1026, and was one of the last and best specimens of the genre pioneered a century and a half earlier by Timothy I. Eliya had the noble courage to tell the vizier that the Arabs had acquired all their scientific knowledge from the Syrians, but had contributed nothing in return. 'The Syrians do not have a single science,' he said, 'that has been passed to them by the Arabs.'

Several other notable Nestorian writers flourished in the eleventh century, including the scholarly patriarch Eliya I (1028–49), commonly known as Eliya of Tirhan, and his contemporary ʿAbdishoʿ Abu Saʿid bar Bahriz, an unsuccessful candidate in the patriarchal election of 1028 who became metropolitan of Mosul in 1030. Eliya of Tirhan was the author of a long work on the principles of religion and also the author of a history, a grammar, poems and letters, while ʿAbdishoʿ bar Bahriz wrote a well-regarded grammar in his youth, and also an exposition of the offices of the Church. Both men were also part of a movement that built on the pioneering work of Timothy I in codifying the canon law of the Church of the East. They both helped to assemble a collection of laws and juridical sentences, and ʿAbdishoʿ wrote a specialist tome on the law of inheritance. The most important figure in this movement, however, was ʿAbdallah ibn al-Tayyib, who served first as secretary to the patriarch Yohannan VI (1012–16) and then to Eliya I, who encouraged his work in this direction. ʿAbdallah was a man of formidable learning, which he showed off in several different literary genres. He practised as a doctor, and wrote commentaries on the medical works of Galen and Hippocrates. He was also the author of the *Paradise of Christianity* (*firdaus al-nasraniya*), a massive commentary on the entire Bible, and wrote separate commentaries on the Psalms (which he translated from Syriac into Arabic) and on the Gospels. His commentaries on the Old and New Testaments were admired by

the Copts, who included them in their own exegetical tradition. Passing later from Egypt into Ethiopia, they were translated into Ge'ez and finally into Amharic, where they influenced the Andemta commentaries that are still in use in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. 'Abdallah was also well read in Greek philosophy, and wrote commentaries on Aristotle (with whose views on logic and metaphysics he disagreed) and the *Isagoge* of Porphyry. He also contributed to the literature of debate with Muslims with his *Treatise on the Trinity*, a defence of fundamental Christian beliefs against Muslim accusations of tritheism, and wrote several other works of theology. He rounded off his literary achievement by translating Tatian's composite gospel, the *Diatessaron*, from Syriac into Arabic. One of his most important achievements was to collect, compile and systematically organise the canon law of the Christian Churches in general and the Nestorian Church in particular. His *Law of Christendom* (*fiqh al-nasraniya*) discussed not only the decisions taken at the great ecumenical councils from Nicaea to Chalcedon but also the canons of the Church of the East. He extracted these decisions from the synods whose acts had been compiled by Timothy I and from many of the later synods down to his own time. He organised this material thematically, in separate chapters on topics such as betrothals and marriages, inheritance, guardianship, taxes, debts and deeds. These were all thorny areas where large sums of money could be involved. Patriarchs and bishops needed all the guidance they could get to ensure that disputes over such matters were settled within the Christian community. If they got it wrong, a disgruntled plaintiff might take his case before a Muslim judge, with embarrassing and unwelcome consequences for all concerned.

Mention should also be made of Ibn Butlan, one of 'Abdallah ibn al-Tayyib's students, a Nestorian doctor who was respected by Muslims and Christians alike as a physician. Although much of Ibn Butlan's literary output was narrowly professional—few except specialists will have heard of his *Health Tables*, even though this work was so well regarded by European medical experts that it was translated into Latin in the sixteenth century—he also wrote a commentary on the Nestorian liturgy. Even in his medical works, he occasionally exploited his Christian upbringing to good effect. In one of his books, a study of the relationship between health and diet, he cited the potentially harmful effects of an unmitigated vegetarian lifestyle on Christian monks 'and others living far away from cities'. A brusque and intolerant man, who did not enjoy being contradicted, he disputed fiercely with his Muslim counterpart 'Ali ibn Ridwan on medical questions. Although these disputes were notionally restricted to the professional sphere, Ibn Butlan could not forget that his opponent was a Muslim. He insisted that all physicians were bound by a strict code of medical ethics, and reminded Ibn Ridwan that they would both have to answer before God at the

Day of Judgement for any infringements of this code. He travelled widely in the Arab world, and left some interesting descriptions of Antioch, Latakia and other cities on his itinerary. In old age he retired into a monastery after the Christians of Antioch rejected his proposals for reforming their religious life.

Mari ibn Sulaiman and His Contemporaries. Much of the literature of the Church of the East in the twelfth century was decidedly dusty. The 'encyclopedic tendency' that began in the tenth century continued unchecked, and academic treatises on technical subjects abounded. Four of the most important Nestorian academic writers of the twelfth century were Isho'yahb bar Malkon, Shem'on of Shanqlabad, Yohannan bar Zo'bi and the patriarch Eliya III Abu Halim (1176–90). Isho'yahb bar Malkon, whose real name seems to have been Yohannan, was consecrated metropolitan of Nisibis in 1190 and lived into the reign of the patriarch Sabrisho' V (1226–56). He wrote in Syriac on questions of grammar, and was also the author of a number of homilies, letters and hymns in Arabic. He has been identified by Wright with a Nestorian bishop of Maiperqat named Joseph bar Malkon, who wrote a metrical tract on Syriac punctuation marks entitled the *Net of the Points* (*msidta d'nugze*). Nestorian bishops often changed their name on appointment to a different diocese, and it is quite possible that the same man took the name Joseph as bishop of Maiperqat and Isho'yahb as metropolitan of Nisibis. If this identification is correct, the *Net of the Points* will have been written before 1190. Shem'on of Shanqlabad (Shaqlawā), who seems also to have flourished around 1190, wrote a Syriac chronological treatise in a form rather resembling that of a catechism, in which a series of abstruse questions on the various dating systems in use received equally abstruse answers. His disciple Yohannan bar Zo'bi, a monk of the monastery of Beth Qoqa near Erbil who flourished in the early years of the thirteenth century, wrote a number of verse treatises on philosophical, theological, liturgical and grammatical topics, of limited interest today except to specialists. He is chiefly remembered as a grammarian. He wrote a long prose grammar in which he synthesised the work of several previous eminent grammarians, including Eliya bar Shinaya, and a shorter verse epitome of its contents, coupled with a metrical tract on punctuation marks doubtless inspired by Joseph bar Malkon's effort. These worthy productions can still be studied with profit by Syriac scholars, but it is doubtful if they are often read for pleasure. Much of Yohannan bar Zo'bi's output, indeed, still awaits a translator and editor. Finally, the patriarch Eliya III Abu Halim wrote in both Syriac and Arabic, and was the author of numerous letters and homilies in Arabic. He is chiefly remembered for compiling and arranging the prayers for the ecclesiastical year; and the Abu Halim, one of the Nestorian service books, still bears his name.

The only other notable Nestorian author of the twelfth century, Mari ibn Sulaiman, is of prime importance as a historian. Mari, who flourished in the first half of the twelfth century and wrote in Arabic, was the author of a massive exposition of Christian beliefs and ritual practices in seven sections, entitled *The Book of the Tower*, often known under its Latin name as the *Liber Turris*. This dreary tome, of interest only to specialists, has not yet been edited. Mari's elaborate arguments for the truth of Christianity, which include a sustained attack upon Jewish beliefs, built up the medieval fortress or tower of the book's title, with chapters dealing successively with its foundations, columns, interior candlelight, ramparts and gardens. The fifth section of the *Book of the Tower* contains a lengthy *History of the Eastern Patriarchs* from the legendary first-century missionary Addai up to the patriarch 'Abdisho' III (1139–48), whose Arabic text was published with a Latin translation by Enrico Gismondi in 1899. This history, which is written in a far more attractive style than the rest of the book, is the only part of the *Book of the Tower* that can be enjoyed by the general reader, and may well have been originally conceived as a separate work. Certainly, Mari would have done better to have published it separately, as it sits most uncomfortably amidst its pious surroundings. For the early centuries of his history Mari used thoroughly unreliable sources, such as the *Acts of Mari*, because he preferred to retail legends rather than admit that he did not know the truth. However, his information improved once he was on firmer ground. For the Sasanian period, and probably also for the succeeding Umayyad and 'Abbasid periods, he relied heavily on the ninth-century *Chronicle of Seert*, and the acts of the patriarchal synods doubtless supplied him with details such as the consecration of bishops by a newly-enthroned patriarch. He treated events within living memory at greater than usual length, and used the testimony of several well-placed informants for this period, including the bishop Awgin of Zabe, who acted as *natar kursya* after the death of the patriarch Yohannan VII (1049–57).

Mari's *History of the Eastern Patriarchs* is a most important historical source for the history of the Church of the East after the Arab conquest, but it is also very partial. Mari's emphasis, particularly in the case of the later patriarchs, was on the intrigues which surrounded their election, and he often described in considerable detail the procedures which attended the death of a patriarch and the election and consecration of his successor. He also recorded the weaknesses of successive patriarchs (some endearing, some less so) with relish, and had a taste for scandal that frequently redeems his narrative from dryness. Many of his paragraphs begin with the words 'At that time a dissension arose', and the promise of these openings rarely disappoints. Mari also assumed that nothing got done without bribery, and gave numerous examples of corruption on an epic scale.

Some of his best passages occur in his account of the reign of the unscrupulous patriarch Abraham III (906–37). During the debate of 912 on the status of the Nestorian and Melkite Churches, Abraham bribed an Arab nobleman to speak up for him when he was accused by al-Muqtadir's vizier of favouring the Greeks. Bar Hebraeus did not go into details in his own description of this scene (quoted earlier), which he abridged from the somewhat longer account given by Mari, and omitted two fine sentences in which Mari evoked the atmosphere of public life under the 'Abbasid caliphs:

Abraham was struck dumb by this accusation, and Ibn Muttalib the Hashemite whispered discreetly to him, 'I will get you off the hook if you pay me a thousand pieces of silver.' Abraham replied, 'No, gold.'

While Mari sometimes mentioned the consecration of metropolitans and bishops by a particular patriarch, he showed no interest in the problems of their daily life in office and their direction of an influential and powerful institution. The lost synodical acts that Mari used for his portraits of the 'Abbasid and Seljuq patriarchs would surely have shed valuable light on these matters, but that was not what Mari was looking for. As a result, while there is no reason to doubt the truth of his depiction of most of the Nestorian patriarchs as venal, self-serving, shallow, feckless and vengeful—traits which they shared with many of the Muslim caliphs and sultans—it was perhaps not the whole truth. Living in a society in which bribery was commonplace, the Nestorian patriarchs would not have obtained high office unless they had fallen in with the local customs. But some of them were pious churchmen and energetic administrators too, and it is a shame that Mari did not tell us more about this aspect of their reigns.

Chapter Six
THE MONGOL CENTURY
(1222–1317)

OVERVIEW

The history of the Church of the East in the thirteenth century was dominated by the Mongols. Between 1220 and 1240 they were a growing but distant threat, providing noises offstage while life in the caliphate ran its usual course. Between 1240 and 1260 they burst upon the western lands in a fury of conquest and destruction, and their armies came close to destroying both Christendom and Islam alike. In 1258 they captured Baghdad and executed the last ‘Abbasid caliph, al-Musta‘sim, raising short-lived hopes for a revival of Christianity in the Middle East. In 1260, over-extended, they were decisively defeated in Palestine by the Mamluks. During the next five decades their power gradually faded away. Their empire splintered into several mutually-antagonistic khanates, their rulers were civilised by close contact with the higher cultures of Persia and China, and their ability to influence events in what had once been the ‘Abbasid caliphate dwindled.

In the second half of the thirteenth century the Mongols succeeded in imposing a precarious period of stability in Asia, and the Nestorian and other Eastern Churches briefly flourished under their protection. The Nestorians, indeed, were able to return to China during the Mongol period, and revive a presence which had almost disappeared centuries earlier. The destruction of the ‘Abbasid caliphate by the Mongols in 1258 encouraged many Christians to believe that the Muslim world had been fatally weakened, and during the period of Mongol ascendancy the Nestorian Church worked to encourage a Mongol-Christian alliance against Islam that would restore Christianity to its old primacy. The Mamluk victory at ‘Ain Jalut, which halted the Mongol advance to the Mediterranean, and the subsequent expulsion of the Crusaders from their last footholds in Palestine put an end to these hopes. By the end of the century the Muslims were back in control throughout the Middle East. Meanwhile, the excesses committed by some Christians during the exhilarating years after the fall of Baghdad in 1258 had embittered Muslim opinion against the Christian minority.

The resurgence of Islam in the late thirteenth century was therefore accompanied by reprisals against the Christian minority in the Mongol domains. The Nestorian Church enjoyed some stability during the reign of the il-khans Arghun (1284–91) and Geikhatu (1291–5), but the succession of the Muslim il-khan Ghazan in 1295 was followed by a brief persecution. There were further disturbances in the following decade and matters came to a head at Erbil in 1310, when a rogue Muslim commander, acting in defiance of the il-khan Uljaitu (1304–16), captured the citadel of Erbil from a Christian garrison and massacred its defenders. Scores of innocent Christian civilians were also killed during the siege. The massacre at Erbil dramatised the decline of Mongol power and the waning influence of the Church of the East.

The thirteenth century is an exceptionally well-documented period in the history of the Church of the East, not only in its Mesopotamian heartland but also in its mission field in Central Asia and China. The secular and ecclesiastical histories of the Jacobite maphrian Bar Hebraeus trace the political history of the Middle East during the Mongol period in great detail. Valuable additional information is provided in the Nestorian histories of ʿAmr and Sliba and in the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*, a fascinating biography of the patriarch Yahballaha III (1281–1317) whose narrative moves from China to Baghdad, from Rome to Bordeaux, and from Maragha to Erbil. These texts vividly illustrate the high politics of the day, and demonstrate that although the Nestorian patriarchs still had some influence at court, it was very limited. These histories are usefully complemented by the accounts of Latin missionaries stationed in the ilkhanate, particularly the narrative of Ricoldo de Monte Croce, which supplies a valuable Western perspective on the reign of Yahballaha III. The sources for the Mongol period also illuminate the life of the Church of the East beyond its Mesopotamian heartland. Thanks to Yahballaha's biography, to the accounts of Marco Polo and other intrepid European travellers in the Mongol lands, and to a wealth of information supplied in several Chinese local histories, the Nestorians of China and Central Asia finally emerge from obscurity. These sources provide a precious glimpse of the Nestorian communities beyond the Oxus, in what was to prove their last century of relatively trouble-free existence.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Church of the East and the Mongols. The patriarch Yahballaha II died in 1222 and was succeeded in the same year by Sabrisho^c IV bar Qayyoma, metropolitan of Erbil, who reigned for only three years. Sabrisho^c was popular with the Christians

of Baghdad because he was the nephew of the late patriarch and, like his uncle, had taken the trouble to ingratiate himself with them. Two and a half centuries later the Nestorian patriarch Shemʿon IV Basidi (c.1450–1497) would make the patriarchal succession hereditary, from uncle to nephew, and this is an interesting early indication that many ordinary Christians had no objection in principle to confining the succession to a single family. Indeed, examples of hereditary succession in the Church of the East can be found as early as the fourth century, when the martyred patriarch Shemʿon bar Sabbaʿe was succeeded by his nephews Shahdost and Barbaʿshmin. Sabrishoʿs candidacy was opposed by the metropolitan Sabrishoʿ ibn al-Masihi of Beth Garmai, an intelligent and honest man whose two brothers were influential doctors at the caliph's court. Unlike his rival, he had attained metropolitan rank through ability, not by his uncle's favour, but his claims were never given a fair hearing. Sabrishoʿ of Erbil smoothed his way to office by disbursing the usual bribes at court, and his nomination was approved by the caliph al-Nasir on the recommendation of the powerful Jacobite doctor Amin al-Dawla. He is said to have governed the Church of the East competently during his brief reign. This may well be true, as he had deputised for his uncle during the last years of the reign of Yahballaha II, and had in practice governed the Church himself.

Sabrishoʿ IV was succeeded in 1226 by his rival Sabrishoʿ of Beth Garmai, whose election was unanimous. Sabrishoʿ V (1226–56) reigned for thirty years, and is said to have administered the Church of the East with great ability during this time, consecrating seventy bishops in all. During his long reign the gravity of the Mongol threat gradually became clear. The Church of the East probably first became aware of the rising power of Genghis Khan in the early years of the thirteenth century, when the Mongols turned against their neighbours and in rapid succession subdued the Kerait, Naiman, Merkit and Ongut. These four tribes, many of whose members had been converted to Christianity by Nestorian missionaries during the previous two centuries, now became allies of Genghis Khan. The Mongol ruler went on to demonstrate that his ambitions went far beyond local domination. His destruction of the Muslim kingdom of Khwarizm, between 1219 and 1222, posed a direct threat to the survival of Islam itself. The Mongols behaved with horrifying savagery, slaughtering the populace of any city that did not open its gates when summoned. The worst butcheries were committed in Khorasan. Merv and Nishapur both had to be taken by storm, and their inhabitants, Muslims and Christians alike, were massacred. The centuries-old Nestorian Christian communities in both cities must have been virtually wiped out.

The Mongol khan Ogodai, who succeeded Genghis in 1229, was as brutal as his predecessor. During the 1230s Mongol pressure increased on the lands of the

‘Abbasid caliphate. Although Georgia and Armenia bore the main brunt of the Mongol terror during this decade, the Nestorians of northern Mesopotamia also suffered from Mongol raids. The Mongols were not yet ready to undertake their long-threatened assault on Baghdad itself, but they had no intention of leaving the caliphate in peace. Parties of raiders descended unexpectedly from the Zagros mountains to harass the towns and cities of Mesopotamia, burning and looting wherever they could. In 1235 a Mongol force took Erbil and then crossed the Tigris to raid as far west as Shigar, where it surprised a merchant caravan on its way to Syria. Before crossing the Great Zab the raiders sacked the monastery of Beth Qoqa. The older monks were killed immediately, and the novices were raped before being murdered in their turn. Carrying off whatever valuables they could from the monastery, the Mongols then headed for Mosul, crossing the Great Zab into Athor, where they pitched camp by a canal near the large Nestorian village of Karamlish. The inhabitants of Karamlish fled for shelter to their church, but this was soon taken by the Mongols. The terrified villagers were told to leave the church by one or other of its two doors. The Mongols then capriciously killed all those who had left by one door, while sparing those who had left by the other. The village of Tel Isqof was also visited by the raiders. Some of the inhabitants were put to death, while others were taken captive to be sold into slavery. It is said that the few villagers who escaped later died of hunger, as the Mongols ravaged the surrounding countryside.

Shortly afterwards the caliphate enjoyed a brief respite. The Mongols turned their arms instead against Christian Europe. The Mongol armies reached the shores of the Adriatic after destroying the Christian kingdoms of Poland and Hungary. The knighthood of central Europe was destroyed on the battlefields of Leignitz and Mohi, and the survival of Christendom itself hung in the balance. Europe was only saved by a miracle. The great khan Ogodai died in December 1241, and as soon as they heard the news the Mongol commanders abandoned their campaign and returned to Mongolia to elect a successor. The Christian kingdoms of Europe gave thanks for their miraculous deliverance and hastened to discover as much as they could about the dreaded Tartars. In 1245, at the behest of Pope Innocent IV, the Franciscan monk John of Plano Carpini made the arduous trek through Central Asia to the Mongol capital Karakorum. He discovered that Christianity was held in some honour at the Mongol court. The great khans did not wish to offend their vassals, and several Kerait and Naiman Christians held positions of power. At Karakorum, Latin and Nestorian Christians alike were agitated by the question of the succession. Between 1241 and 1246 there was no great khan. Ogodai’s widow Toregene, herself a Nestorian Christian, was acting as regent, and was known to be scheming to secure the succession for her son

Kuyuk instead of Ogodai's grandson Siremun. The patriarch Sabrisho^c V doubtless encouraged his fellow-Christians at the Mongol court to work for the succession of Kuyuk. Potentially, the Church of the East had a dazzling opportunity. If Kuyuk succeeded Ogodai, there was every chance that the next great khan could be converted to Christianity. Perhaps he could then be persuaded to ally with the Christian kingdoms of the West and turn the Mongol armies against Islam.

Besides gathering intelligence on the Mongol threat, Innocent IV also revived contacts with the captive Eastern Churches. There had been little formal communication between the Roman Church and its Nestorian and Jacobite counterparts since well before the Arab conquest, but the Crusades had helped to revive interest in the Latin West in the hard-pressed Christian communities living under Muslim rule. Aware of their present weakness, but aware too that they might revive if the Mongols crushed the imperilled ^cAbbasid caliphate, Innocent judged that the time was ripe to try to win the separated Christian Churches over to Catholic orthodoxy. At the same time as his envoys headed along the Silk Road to distant Karakorum, he despatched the Dominican monk Andrew of Longjumeau to the Middle East to make contact with the heads of the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches and urge them to unite with the Roman Church. At the same time, a Franciscan mission was sent to the Armenian and Greek Orthodox Churches. To ease their task, the Latin missionaries were given permission to break bread with the heretical Eastern Christians and worship alongside them, though to avoid scandal they were asked to keep their distance from them in the Frankish baronies of Outremer. Andrew of Longjumeau was unable to meet the patriarch Sabrisho^c V in person, because as a Frank he could not travel in the lands of Islam, but he was able to extract orthodox confessions of faith, probably drafted by himself, from Isho^cyahb bar Malkon, the Nestorian metropolitan of Nisibis, and several other Nestorian bishops in the cities of northern Mesopotamia under Mongol control. He also met a Nestorian periodeut in Tabriz named Rabban Shem^con, who claimed to be one of Kuyuk's senior advisers. Shem^con gave the Dominican monk a letter to take back to the pope, in which he commended to his care the Nestorians living under Frankish rule in the Holy Land. Andrew of Longjumeau was delighted with the progress he had made, as was Pope Innocent IV, but their efforts came to nothing in the end. Alas, it seems all too clear that Andrew of Longjumeau had been taken in by the Nestorians. Rabban Shem^con had almost certainly exaggerated his supposed influence with Kuyuk, and Isho^cyahb bar Malkon and his fellow bishops were merely being tactful when they subscribed to a Catholic profession of faith. Wearied by Andrew's earnest attentions, and seeing no reason why they should abandon the orthodox faith they had always held, the Nestorian bishops fobbed their visitor off with extravagant professions

of goodwill until he went away. Neither Innocent IV nor his enthusiastic envoy appreciated how empty these Nestorian professions were. On the one side were unrealistic expectations and wishful thinking, on the other polite prevarication. A pattern of misunderstanding emerged during the first contacts between the Roman and Nestorian Churches which would recur often during the next six centuries, complicating enormously the relations between the Vatican and the Church of the East. The frequent reports by Latin missionaries of the conversion of Nestorian bishops and metropolitans, and sometimes even a patriarch or two, must always be taken with a large pinch of salt.

The Collapse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate. In 1246 Kuyuk did indeed succeed Ogodai, and even received Christian baptism (probably at the hands of a Nestorian bishop), but hopes that he would listen to his Christian advisers were soon dashed. The new great khan was just as expansionist as Genghis and Ogodai had been, and was determined to conquer any kingdom, Christian or Muslim, which did not acknowledge his supremacy. He brushed off approaches from the Western Christians and wrote an insolent letter to Innocent IV, ordering him to come to Karakorum in person and pay homage. He ruled for only two years, and on his death in 1248 he was succeeded by Mongke (1251–9), the grandson of Genghis Khan by his youngest son Tolui. Mongke, although his wife was a Nestorian Christian from the Oirat tribe, made no pretence of professing Christianity. However, he tolerated with a good grace the Christian ceremonies performed at his court at his wife's request, and was slightly more patient than his predecessor Kuyuk had been with the importunities of the Latin and Nestorian priests who hovered around his throne. Mongke was determined to deliver the *coup de grace* to the tottering 'Abbasid caliphate, and was anxious to enlist Christian allies in his war against Islam.

In 1257 the Mongols took the field against the Assassins of the Elburz mountains and the 'Abbasid caliphate. Sixteen years earlier Christendom had nearly perished under the Mongol onslaught. Now, once again, it was the Muslims who would bear the brunt of a Mongol drive into the west. For many Eastern Christians, including the Nestorian advisers who intrigued at Mongke's court, the Mongol campaign against the caliphate offered the enticing prospect of the extermination of Islam and the revival of Christianity throughout the Middle East. Persia and Iraq would be purged of Muslim influence, and Christians would finally be able to worship without fear in their ancestral lands, free from the irksome restrictions imposed upon them by the caliphs. Some Western Christian rulers felt that the Christian kingdoms should help the Mongols against the Muslims, including a number of Georgian leaders who enthusiastically pledged their support

to the coming campaign. Others were less impressed by such wishful thinking, remembering the destruction which the Mongols had wrought in their terrible invasion of Christian Europe a few years earlier. They believed that the Mongols would be equally merciless in their conquest of Muslim Asia, that its considerable Christian minorities would suffer along with the Muslim population, and that the defeat of the Muslims by the Mongols would not necessarily be to the advantage of Christianity. Aware of the ambivalence of the Western Christians towards their cause, and anxious to enlist as many Christian allies as they could for the final showdown with Islam, the Mongols assiduously courted the support of the Eastern Christians during their campaign against the 'Abbasid caliphate. They refrained, where possible, from harming Christians in the cities which they took. The overall direction of the campaign was in the hands of Mongke's brother Hulegu. Hulegu's Kerait wife Dokuz Khatun, a Nestorian Christian, accompanied the Mongol army on its march into Persia and celebrated mass every day in a wheeled chapel. The Mongol armies were under the immediate command of the Naiman general Kitbuqa, the most talented of Hulegu's captains. Like Dokuz Khatun, Kitbuqa was a Nestorian Christian.

In Baghdad, the caliph al-Musta'sim (1242–58) and his advisers waited impassively for the storm to break over their heads. The Nestorian patriarch Sabrisho^c V died in 1256, and the approach of the Mongols overshadowed the politics of the patriarchal election of 1257. The main contenders were the elderly metropolitans Eliya of Elam and Makkikha of Nisibis and their energetic young rival Denha of Erbil, who had achieved the remarkable feat of becoming a metropolitan bishop while still in his twenties. The caliph was determined to sell the patriarchate to the highest bidder, and during the ten months in which the patriarchal throne was vacant all three men repeatedly raised their offers. Finally, according to Bar Hebraeus, the asking price stood at the colossal figure of 45,000 gold dinars. The caliph's advisers let it be known that the first man to secure this sum would be appointed patriarch. The race was won by Denha of Erbil, who made a down payment of 4,000 dinars, but his chances were ruined by a clever piece of slander by Makkikha's backers. Denha was a friend of the Tartars, they said, 'and however much money you take from him now he will soon take back from you twofold.' Alarmed, the caliph ordered that Makkikha should be appointed patriarch instead of Denha. Denha's deposit was refunded, and Makkikha was saddled with his debt instead. The new patriarch probably borrowed the money from Baghdad's Jewish moneylenders. In the event, he had an enormous stroke of luck. When the Mongols captured Baghdad in January 1258 they slaughtered the city's Jewish and Muslim population. Nobody was left to press Makkikha for repayment, and (as Bar Hebraeus put it) 'he was freed from having to pay back the money he had borrowed.'

The Mongol commander Hulegu took little over a year to destroy the Assassins, and in early 1258 began his advance on Baghdad. Al-Musta‘sim was summoned to dismantle the city’s fortifications and do homage in person for his life. The commander of the faithful foolishly rejected this demand, and the Muslims of Baghdad sealed their own fate by lynching the Mongol envoys. The Mongols advanced into Iraq in three columns and encircled the ‘Abbasid capital. While two columns closed in on Baghdad from the east, a third crossed the Tigris near Mosul to envelop the city from the west. The defenders of Mosul surrendered without a fight, and the Mongols offered no violence to its citizens. Erbil had to be taken by assault, but there too the Mongols showed studious moderation. In January 1258 the three columns closed the ring around Baghdad, drove the ‘Abbasid forces back into the doomed city, and settled down to besiege it. The defences were eventually breached and al-Musta‘sim sued several times for peace. The Nestorian patriarch Makkikha II led the final delegation to the Mongols, a choice which indicates that the caliph was by then close to despair. Makkikha perhaps went through the motions of interceding for al-Musta‘sim, but he must have secretly hoped for Baghdad to be liberated from Muslim rule, provided that the Christians escaped the horrors which normally attended a sack by the Mongols. He therefore used his audience with Hulegu principally to secure a promise that Baghdad’s Christians would be spared if the city opened its gates.

Al-Musta‘sim finally surrendered unconditionally. As he had sanctioned the murder of the Mongol envoys who had demanded his homage, his life was forfeit. According to the chroniclers, the last caliph of the ‘Abbasid dynasty was rolled in a carpet and trampled to death by horses. Baghdad was then given up to plunder and pillage by the Mongol troops and their Georgian allies. In the days that followed most of the city’s Muslims and Jews, perhaps as many as 90,000 individuals, were slaughtered. But Hulegu honoured the pledge he had given to the Nestorian patriarch. At Makkikha’s bidding, the Christians of Baghdad, Nestorians and Jacobites alike, congregated for safety in one of the city’s churches, where the Mongols left them unmolested. After the butchery was completed, Hulegu presented the Nestorian patriarch with the ‘palace of the finance minister’, one of Baghdad’s many handsome administrative buildings, as his patriarchal residence. Makkikha also moved his staff into two other nearby government offices, whose Arabic inscriptions were erased and replaced by improving texts in Syriac. For the moment, the Christians were rulers in Baghdad.

The Mongol capture of Baghdad was a stunning blow to the prestige of Islam. Christians in cities still under Muslim rule openly rejoiced at the Mongol victory and the massacre of the Muslim population. More was to come, as the Mongols continued to advance towards the Mediterranean coast and their ultimate aim,

the conquest of Mamluk Egypt. In 1259 Hulegu broke his camp in Adarbaigan, forded the Euphrates by a bridge of boats and descended on Muslim Syria from the north. His progress resembled a Crusade. In Tabriz the Mongol army was blessed by the Armenian patriarch. At Maiperqat, which the Mongols were forced to besiege, Muslims were slaughtered while the city's Armenian, Jacobite and Nestorian Christians were spared. Aleppo too refused to surrender, and was stormed and sacked. Like his counterpart Makkikha II at Baghdad, the Jacobite maphrian Bar Hebraeus left the city to intercede with the Mongol commander for the lives of Aleppo's Christians. Again, Muslims were killed while Christians were saved, mosques were burned while churches were spared. Two Christian leaders offered their services for the march on Damascus that concluded the 1259 campaign. King Hayton of Cilician Armenia joined the Mongols with 16,000 Armenian soldiers, and Count Bohemund VI of Antioch contributed a contingent of Frankish troops. Damascus, warned by the fate of Maiperqat and Aleppo, opened its gates to Kitbuqa and was spared. The Mongol commander entered the captured city on horseback, flanked by his Christian allies. The entry of these three Christian potentates into one of the great citadels of the Muslim world struck the Christian imagination. In a contemporary icon of the Adoration of the Magi from one of the Sinai monasteries, the three kings are portrayed with the features of Kitbuqa and his two Western allies.

Prudence and decency both counselled restraint, but the Eastern Christians were immoderate in victory. The cross was carried in procession through the streets of Damascus, and Muslims were forced to bow as it passed. The Umayyad Mosque was profaned by frolicking unbelievers, who rang bells and toasted one another in wine in one of the holiest places of Islam. Another mosque was converted into a church. Believing that Persia, Iraq and Syria had been permanently liberated from Muslim rule, the Christians did not consider whether it was wise to flaunt their hatred for their Muslim neighbours quite so openly.

All was now set for the final drive towards Egypt, and the Mamluks were warned that they alone held out against the Mongols. But before Hulegu could launch his campaign the situation was transformed by the news that his brother, the great khan Mongke, had died in China the previous August and that fighting had broken out between two rival claimants to the succession. Khubilai, Hulegu's younger brother, was in arms against Ariq-boga, one of the sons of Tolui. Fearing that this conflict might spill over into Persia, Hulegu decided to concentrate the bulk of his forces in Adarbaigan, leaving only a light screen of troops in Syria under the command of Kitbuqa.

Just as the death of Ogodai in 1241 had saved Christian Europe, the death of Mongke in 1259 saved Muslim Asia. The Mamluks, heartened by the dispersal of

Mongol strength, marched out to confront the enemies of Islam in Palestine with their regular army and a horde of hastily-levied conscripts. The Mamluk sultan Qutuz requested permission from the Franks to pass through their territory to engage the Mongols. In an agony of indecision, the Crusader barons debated their answer. In the end, fear and distrust of the Mongols trumped hatred of Islam. The Franks rejected the policy of the Eastern Christians and granted free passage to the Mamluk army. The decisive battle between the Mongols and the Mamluks was fought on 3 September 1260, at ‘Ain Jalut in the Jezreel valley near Nablus. Kitbuqa’s army, greatly outnumbered, was surrounded and annihilated. The myth of Mongol invincibility was shattered, Christians were lynched in Damascus by jubilant Muslim crowds, and hopes of a revival of Christianity in the Middle East under Mongol patronage were dashed once and for all. During the next four decades this alluring vision faded gradually away, like the insubstantial mirage it had always been.

Nevertheless, the Mongols still ruled much of the Muslim world, including Iraq and Persia, and during the last four decades of the thirteenth century some of the Mongol *il-khans* were Christians, and Christian governors ruled in many Moslem cities. They naturally did their best for their fellow-Christians, but they had a hard task. The Muslims were restive under Mongol rule, and if they were no longer allowed to persecute the Christians officially, they took it out on them in other ways. Muslims outnumbered Christians substantially in the major cities, and came out onto the streets in force if they felt that the Christians were getting above themselves. Relations between the two faiths were very tense, and the slightest suspicion of an insult could trigger a major riot. There were scenes of unrest not only in Baghdad, long a flashpoint for violence between Christians and Muslims, but also in the Mongol garrison town of Erbil, whose Christians flaunted their faith in public on several occasions, gambling that the Mongols would intervene to protect them if things turned nasty. Ultimately, it was a game that could only have one ending. It took time for the Muslims to prise the Christian governors from their positions of power, but the accession of the Muslim *il-khan* Ghazan in 1295 was an important turning point. The histories of the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches during the second half of the thirteenth century gave enormous space to the fortunes of individual Christian governors and the narrative of small-scale clashes between Christians and Muslims, because such events dramatised the gradual revival of Muslim power.

During the final years of Makkikha’s reign there was a thaw in the icy relations between the Nestorians and the Jacobites. In 1261 the Muslim governor of Mosul revolted against the Mongols. This rash move had disastrous consequences for Christians of the Mosul region, particularly for the Jacobites. A group of

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Jacobites, mostly from the village of Beth Sahraye, reacted to the news of the revolt by making for the shelter of Erbil, which was at this period governed by the Christian emir Taj al-Din Mukhtas. However, they were caught by the Mongols while trying to cross the Great Zab, and massacred by the emir Kutlu Beg, who believed that they were in league with the rebels. In the following year there was another, larger exodus of Jacobites from the Mosul plain. The refugees arrived at the gates of Erbil and begged to be admitted. The Nestorian patriarch happened to be in the city at the time, and offered the Jacobites the temporary use of the nave of one of the Nestorian churches in the city. Soon afterwards he left Erbil and its young metropolitan Denha, smarting from his defeat in the patriarchal election of 1257 and impatient at Makkikha's grudging response to the Jacobite pleas, secured permission from the emir for the Jacobites to build a church of their own in Erbil. The Jacobites seized their opportunity eagerly, pooled together the last of their money, and bought a building which they converted into a church dedicated to Mar Behnam. Denha's generous gesture, unthinkable a few centuries earlier, reflected the increasingly precarious position of the Christian minorities in the caliphate. Although he no doubt enjoyed snubbing the patriarch by going against his known wishes, he was also sensible enough to realise that circumstances now required the two Churches to work together instead of fighting one another. The Jacobites who begged for shelter in Erbil were no longer the dangerous heretics of earlier days but desperate refugees who could be won to friendship by a little generosity, thereby affording a welcome reinforcement to the Christian ranks in Erbil.

The Reign of Denha I (1265–81). Makkikha II died in 1265, and was succeeded by his old rival Denha of Erbil, who hastened to Hulegu's camp in Adarbaigan to lobby for the succession as soon as he heard the news of Makkikha's death. His timing was admirable. He arrived ahead of the other Nestorian bishops, to find that Hulegu had just died. For the moment, power was in the hands of the il-khan's Christian widow Dokuz Khatun, who was told by her advisers that Denha would have been elected in 1257 had Makkikha not spoiled his chances by spreading alarming rumours of his intrigues with the Mongols. Without consulting the leaders of the Church of the East, she ordered that Denha should be the new patriarch. The appointment was subsequently confirmed by the new il-khan Abaqa (1265–80), and Denha's consecration in Baghdad was attended by four metropolitans and eleven bishops.

Like his predecessor Hulegu, Abaqa sympathised with the Christians, and ordered that all clerks in government offices should be either Christians or Jews but not Muslims. He also followed Hulegu's example by appointing Christian

governors for both Mosul and Erbil, and these appointments were welcomed by the Christians as a sign that they enjoyed the favour of the il-khans. Nevertheless, there was a limit to what the Christians could get away with. In 1268 Denha foolishly provoked a Muslim riot in Baghdad by announcing his intention of holding a public ceremony of baptism for a Christian from Tagrit who had converted to Islam and wished to return to his old faith. The rioters attempted to break into the patriarchal palace, and Denha had to flee for his life to Abaqa's camp. He never again attempted to govern the Church of the East from Baghdad. Instead, he fixed his residence at Erbil, where he felt more secure.

In 1269 a failed attempt was made in Baghdad by some Muslim fanatics to assassinate the head of the divan 'Ala al-Din. The intended victim was only wounded, and the conspirators were rounded up and brutally executed. It was soon rumoured that the Christians had been behind the plot, and all prominent Christians in Baghdad were seized and imprisoned. In Erbil, Denha and his entourage were also thrown into prison. Christian officials in high places were powerless to stop this outrage. Eventually Abaqa intervened and ordered all the imprisoned Christians to be released. Denha now withdrew to Eshnuq in Adarbaigan, close to Abaqa's camp, where he resided for most of the rest of his reign. For five centuries the Nestorian patriarchs had sat at Baghdad. The Muslims had now succeeded in driving them into an obscure provincial town, far from the centre of events. It was a portent of things to come.

There was more trouble in Erbil in 1274. The city's Nestorians, determined to celebrate Palm Sunday with a public procession to the citadel and fearing trouble from the Muslims, persuaded a number of Christian soldiers from the Mongol garrison to act as an escort. The 'Tartar' soldiers—Naiman or Kerait tribesmen, perhaps—pointedly placed crosses on the heads of their spears and rode in front of the procession. The result was what might have been expected. A large crowd of Muslims assembled near the citadel. As the Christian procession made its way towards them, led by the Nestorian metropolitan of Erbil and his acolytes in full pomp, the Muslims pelted the Christians and their cavalry escort with stones. The Mongol soldiers scattered, the procession disintegrated, and the Christians fled in terror. For several days afterwards, Christians did not dare show themselves in the streets of Erbil.

As Muslim animosity towards the Christians increased, the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches drew closer together for protection. Denha had shown his sympathy for the plight of Jacobite refugees from the Mosul district during the reign of his predecessor Makkikha, and as patriarch he continued to encourage Jacobite settlement in and around Erbil. One of his first acts was to turn over the village of Beth Sayyade, some miles from Erbil, to the Jacobites, and during the

late 1260s this village grew into an important Jacobite centre. In 1275 its Jacobite population was greatly increased by an influx of refugees from the Mosul plain village of Beth Takshur, which had recently been raided. Two years later the Jacobites consecrated a bishop for this community. In normal circumstances, the Nestorians would never have permitted such a step.

Denha I probably wished to be remembered by posterity for his charity towards the Jacobites, but his patriarchate was ultimately defined by a dispute with Shem'on bar Qaligh, bishop of Tus, which culminated in a scandal which would probably have resulted in his deposition had he not died first. In 1279 Denha consecrated Shem'on metropolitan of Tangut in northwest China. The appointment went to Shem'on's head, and he insulted the patriarch by not showing him the respect due to his position. Mortally offended, Denha arrested Shem'on before he set out for China and imprisoned him in a remote monastery near Eshnuq. Shem'on escaped, but was quickly recaptured and returned to the patriarch. He was now confined in a house close to the patriarch's own residence in Eshnuq, together with his bishops and monks. Several days later, he and all the members of his entourage were found dead. Bar Hebraeus diplomatically refused to commit himself on the circumstances of their deaths in his *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, noting merely that 'there are many different versions of what happened', but the death of a metropolitan and several bishops could not be hushed up. Many Nestorian Christians were convinced that the patriarch had ordered Shem'on's death, and Denha would go down in the folk memory of the Church of the East as 'Denha Qatola', 'Denha the Murderer'. Feeling against the patriarch was intense.

Shortly before Shem'on's suspicious death two Nestorian monks from the Ongut territories on the northern borders of China called on the patriarch in Maragha to pay their respects. Their names were Rabban Sawma and Mark, and thanks to Denha's patronage both men went on to distinguished careers in the closing years of the century, Mark as the patriarch Yahballaha III (1281–1317) and Rabban Sawma as Yahballaha's personal envoy to Pope Nicholas IV. According to the anonymous fourteenth-century *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*, probably written on Yahballaha's orders, both men had grown up in the 1260s and 1270s in a monastery near the Mongol capital Khanbalik. In 1275 they left the monastery to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. From Khanbalik they journeyed through Koshang, where two princes of the Christian Ongut tribe tried to dissuade them from making the dangerous journey to the West, and when their persuasion failed gave them horses, gold, silver and clothing to ease their journey. From Koshang they made their way with difficulty through Tangut and Khotan to Kashgar. The Mongol great khan Khubilai had recently put down a rebellion in these regions, and the monks travelled through a devastated countryside and a starving population.

Kashgar had been sacked by the rebels and abandoned by its inhabitants. The travellers went on to the court of 'King Kaidu' at Talas, where they received letters patent 'so that no one in his land might be able to hurt them', and finally arrived in 1278 'with difficulty, weariness, and fear' in Khorasan, having lost most of their baggage on the road. They were entertained in the monastery of Mar Sehyon near Tus by the city's bishop, very probably the ill-fated Shem'on Bar Qaligh. They then travelled on to Maragha, where they introduced themselves to the patriarch Denha.

After spending some days at Maragha the two monks went on to Baghdad, and from there to Seleucia-Ctesiphon, where they visited the relics of Mar Mari. They then toured the principal Nestorian churches and monasteries of northern Mesopotamia before resting for a while in the monastery of Mar Mikha'il of Tar'il near Erbil. Knowing that they intended to travel on to Jerusalem, Denha asked them to deliver a message to the il-khan Abaqa. This they did, and Abaqa asked them to take some of his own letters to Jerusalem. However, they were unable to complete their journey to Jerusalem because the roads were cut, and in early 1279 sought out Denha in Eshnuq to explain what had happened. Their arrival was providential. Denha, who was already preparing to move against Shem'on Bar Qaligh, consecrated Mark metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of Katai and Ong in northern China, choosing the name Yahballaha for him by lot, and appointed Rabban Sawma his visitor general. Yahballaha and Rabban Sawma both received the necessary letters for their journey back to China and were prepared to start when they learned that the roads had been cut by brigands, and so they returned to their cell in the monastery of Mar Mikha'il. Several months later, early in 1281, Yahballaha set off for Baghdad to receive his metropolitan's cope and pastoral staff from Denha, who had left for the city shortly beforehand. He arrived to find that the patriarch was dead. Denha had fallen ill on the way to Baghdad and, after lingering in the city for a few days, died on 24 February 1281.

The *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark* made no attempt to explain the patriarch's curious decision to appoint a footloose Ongut monk metropolitan of China, but other sources were better informed. According to the *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus, Yahballaha had important and useful connections. Yahballaha was related to the emir Ashmut, who enjoyed the confidence of the great khan Khubilai, and had undertaken his pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Khubilai's order. Yahballaha was, in fact, one of Khubilai's spies, whose pilgrimage gave him the opportunity to discreetly observe and report on Abaqa's administration of the il-khanate. No wonder he could demand safe-conducts from 'King Kaidu' of Talas and from Abaqa himself, and could command hospitality from Ongut princes and Nestorian patriarchs and bishops. No wonder too, that the embattled

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patriarch Denha had sought to gain a useful ally by rewarding his influential Ongut visitor with such an attractive appointment.

Yahballaha III (1281–1317), the Ongut Patriarch. On the day after Denha's funeral a meeting was held to elect the new patriarch. The metropolitan Maran'ammeh of Elam presided, in his capacity as 'guardian of the throne', and the electors included several Mesopotamian bishops and 'the magnates and notables, scholars, lawyers and doctors of Baghdad'. They chose Yahballaha, and a deputation of Nestorian bishops accompanied the patriarch-designate to Adarbaigan to seek his confirmation by the il-khan Abaqa. This was little more than a formality, as Abaqa had no wish to offend a man who was rumoured to have the ear of the great khan Khubilai. In November 1281, eight months after his election, Yahballaha III was consecrated patriarch in the great church of Kokhe in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the presence of around thirty Nestorian bishops. The occasion saw one of the largest assemblies of bishops in the history of the Church of the East, and was remarkable also for the considerable distances travelled by many of those present. Yahballaha himself had come all the way from Khanbalik. He was accompanied to Seleucia-Ctesiphon by the five most senior metropolitans and the familiar scattering of suffragan bishops from northern Mesopotamia and Elam, but on this one occasion they were joined by representatives of some of the most remote and exotic provinces of the Nestorian Church, including bishops from Tangut in northwest China, from Merv, Tus and Samarkand, and from the spice island of Soqatra in the Indian Ocean. Their presence was a tribute to the generally peaceful travelling conditions prevailing in the lands under Mongol rule.

All previous Nestorian patriarchs had been either Syrian or Persian, but Yahballaha III was an Ongut by birth, and was known both by contemporaries and by later generations of Nestorian Christians as 'Yahballaha the Turk'. His weak command of Syriac was less important in the eyes of the leaders of the Church of the East than his connections in the Mongol hierarchy, and he was elected because he spoke the language of the Mongols and was believed to have some influence with Khubilai Khan. This supposed influence was illusory. Events soon demonstrated that Yahballaha's views carried little weight with the il-khans, and even less with Khubilai. His reign is memorable rather for the refreshing clarity of perspective which he brought to his office. Brought up in the northern borderlands of China, he was indifferent to the historical circumstances which had created the divisions between the Christian Churches of the Middle East, and considered it disgraceful that fellow-Christians should quarrel with one another. He also recognised that the prosperity which these Churches were presently enjoying under Mongol protection was precarious, and that disunity was

a luxury which they could not afford if they were to have any hope of maintaining their position against the rising tide of Islam. He therefore had little patience with conservatives in his own Church who continued to indulge their traditional dislike of the Jacobites, and believed that Latin, Armenian, Greek, Jacobite and Nestorian Christians must overcome their mutual jealousies and work together. From the earliest days of his patriarchate he sought to conciliate the Jacobites, and he was fortunate that the able Jacobite maphrian Bar Hebraeus was a man of equal flexibility, who responded readily to his overtures. Bar Hebraeus might call the Nestorians 'children of the ancient Chaldeans', implying that they were no better than pagan sorcerers, or pretend that their slightly old-fashioned Syriac dialect was incomprehensible to a Jacobite, but he did so affectionately. Like Yahballaha, he believed that the Christians had better things to do than fight one another. These two remarkable men liked and respected one another, and Yahballaha's generosity towards the Jacobites, which contrasted sharply with the selfishness of some of his predecessors, was gratefully acknowledged by Bar Hebraeus.

Abaqa died in April 1282, and was succeeded by his Muslim brother Ahmad. Abaqa's son Arghun, a devout Buddhist, claimed the throne for himself and rose in revolt against his uncle. Shortly after Ahmad's accession Yahballaha III was accused by his rival Isho'sabran, metropolitan of Tangut, and several other bishops of favouring Arghun's revolt. This charge may well have been true, but the bishops also falsely claimed that Yahballaha had denounced Ahmad in a letter he had just sent to Khubilai. The patriarch protested his innocence, and on his advice the courier was overtaken in Khorasan and the supposedly-treasonable letter recovered. In the meantime Yahballaha was stripped of all his titles and honours and spent forty days in prison. When the letter was opened its contents vindicated Yahballaha's story, and he was released and restored to favour. He took his leave of Ahmad and went to live in the Mongol administrative centre of Maragha in Adarbaigan, a town where he spent much of his time in later years.

Ahmad was defeated by Arghun and executed in August 1284: Yahballaha is said to have foreseen his downfall in a vision in the church of Mart Maryam in Urmia. Arghun's accession was hailed with delight by the Christians of Persia. They had perhaps taken Abaqa too much for granted, but Ahmad's reign brought home to them how precarious their position was among a population still mainly Muslim. With Ahmad dead the future looked brighter for Christians, and Yahballaha took immediate advantage of the new regime. Firstly, he took belated revenge on the metropolitan Isho'sabran of Tangut, who had been kept in custody at Maragha for several months. He denounced Isho'sabran to Arghun, who immediately ordered the metropolitan to be executed. Yahballaha pleaded for mercy, and the il-khan agreed to leave his punishment to the patriarch. Yahballaha, vindicated by Arghun's

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public show of support, contented himself with degrading and excommunicating his treacherous suffragan. Secondly, he had sufficient confidence in the future to spend a considerable sum of money to rebuild the old Nestorian church of Mar Shallita in Maragha.

The Jacobite maphrian Bar Hebraeus, who had been seriously ill for some months, died after a short illness during a visit to Maragha in 1286. Yahballaha III also happened to be in the city at the time, and as few Jacobites lived in Maragha he took charge of the funeral arrangements and mobilised the city's Nestorian, Greek and Armenian Christians to ensure that his old friend was buried with honour. He ordered the Christians of Maragha to put aside their normal business and to close the shops, and by this means was able to assemble around 200 Christians for the maphrian's funeral service. He provided candles and other necessities for the service, and instructed several of his own bishops to pay their respects. It was a courtesy that few of his predecessors would have extended to the head of a rival Church.

The Reign of Arghun (1285–91). When Arghun came to the throne in 1284 the Franks still retained a number of coastal towns in Palestine, though the Mamluk general Baybars had already begun the systematic reduction of their strongholds which culminated in 1291 with the capture of Acre. The Mongol il-khans of Persia remained at war with the Mamluks and their Kipchak allies, and in the 1270s made a number of forays across the Euphrates in an attempt to avenge the defeat at 'Ain Jalut. None succeeded, and the Mongols gradually came to realise that their forces in Persia were not powerful enough to win a war on two fronts. Accordingly, they began seeking allies of their own. The obvious candidates were the Christian powers, which had so often sent armies to defend their outposts in the Holy Land. The Mamluks were threatening the existence of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and it was possible that a Crusade might be organised to defend it if Mongol support was forthcoming. The early Muslim il-khans, Abaqa and Ahmad, could not bring themselves to approach Christians for help against fellow-Muslims, but their successors were more practical, and strenuous diplomatic efforts were made between 1285 and 1307, particularly by the Buddhist il-khan Arghun, to attempt to interest the Christian kingdoms in a joint campaign against the Mamluks. None of these embassies was successful, as enthusiasm for crusading was at a low ebb in the West, but for several years these abortive contacts kept alive the possibility of a Christian-Mongol alliance against the Mamluks, and were an important feature of the diplomacy of the time. Most of the envoys sent by the il-khans to the courts of Western Europe were Nestorian clerics, chosen because as Christians they were likely to receive a warmer welcome than Muslim ambassadors. During the reign of Arghun, for the first time since the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, the Church of

the East played a significant role in international diplomacy and politics. It would never again enjoy such prominence.

Arghun sent three unsuccessful embassies to the west, in 1285, 1287 and 1291. A detailed description of the mission of 1287 has survived in the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*, because on this occasion Arghun's chief envoy was Yahballaha's friend Rabban Sawma, who wrote an account of his journey in Persian which was used by the anonymous author of the *History*. Rabban Sawma and his party set out in March 1287, travelling first from a Black Sea port to Constantinople, where they spent some time seeing the sights and relics. From there a two month voyage took them to Naples, where on 24 June they witnessed a naval battle in the Bay of Sorrento between the fleets of Charles II of Naples and James II of Aragon. From Naples the party went by road to Rome, where they were received by the cardinals. Pope Honorius IV had recently died, and while the arrangements were being made for the election of his successor Rabban Sawma visited Paris, where he met King Philip IV of France. He travelled on to Gascony, meeting King Edward I of England at Bordeaux. From Gascony the envoys returned to spend the winter in Genoa, and in the spring of 1288 they were received in audience at Rome by the recently-elected Pope Nicholas IV. Rabban Sawma remained in Rome to celebrate Easter and then returned to Baghdad, laden with gifts and precious relics but with no promise of joint military action. He had spent just over a year in the lands of Christendom, where the rulers were Christians, where Christians could worship freely, and where the Muslim call to prayer was nowhere to be heard. His feelings on returning to Iraq are not difficult to imagine.

During his first visit to Rome, in the summer of 1287, Rabban Sawma was interrogated by the cardinals on his religious beliefs. Because he was in Rome on important diplomatic business the exchange of views that followed, recorded in detail in the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*, was inconclusive, though the Nestorian envoy resented the assumption of the Roman cardinals that they had the right to judge the beliefs of the Church of the East. Rabban Sawma explained that Christianity had been brought to the East by the apostles Thomas, Addai and Mari, not by the Roman Church, and that missionaries of the Church of the East had preached Christianity to the Mongols, the Turks and the Chinese. 'Today,' he said, 'many of the Mongols are Christians. There are princes and queens who have been baptised and confess Christ. They have churches with them in the camp, and show great honour to the Christians, and there are many converts among them.' The cardinals then asked for his creed and, from what they knew of recent Nestorian patriarchs, presumably expected it to be acceptable. They were disappointed. Rabban Sawma's profession of faith, based closely on the Nicene Creed, was free of heresy, but in response to further questions he

told them that Christ had two natures in two hypostases and one person—the classic Theodoran formula—and also that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father only. His hearers showed signs of restiveness at this point, and Rabban Sawma adroitly changed the subject by asking to be shown the tombs of Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

While Arghun's diplomats were failing to secure a Christian-Mongol alliance, Muslim resentment against the Christians of the il-khanate was growing. The Christians suffered a serious blow in 1289 with the fall of the prince Boka, a powerful sympathiser in the il-khanate administration, and the execution of the Christian governors Mas'ud of Mosul and Taj al-Din Mukhtas of Erbil, both of whom seem to have been either corrupt or incompetent. In the summer of 1291 there were yet again ominous scenes in Erbil, where a force of 3,000 Christian irregular cavalymen in Mongol pay had outraged Muslim opinion by destroying a number of Kurdish villages several months earlier during a punitive expedition. These troopers, recruited from the Nestorian villages of the hill country of Hnitha to the east of 'Aqra, were known as 'the mountaineers' (*qayajaye*). They were notorious for their brutality and indiscipline, and their Christianity did nothing to improve their reputation in Muslim eyes. The Kurds waited until the Mongols withdrew their regular forces, and then marched on Erbil to take their revenge. The inhabitants of the Nestorian village of 'Ainqawa and the other Christian villages in their path abandoned their homes and took shelter in the citadel of Erbil, where the *qayajaye* were feverishly making preparations to withstand a siege. Only the hasty return of the Mongol regular troops prevented the Kurds from assaulting the citadel. For the moment, though not for long, order was restored in Erbil. During this uneasy period, the Christians made the most of Arghun's occasional acts of favour. In 1289 the il-khan summoned Yahballaha to his camp at Maragha and allowed a Christian chapel to be consecrated in an ornate tent next to the royal pavilion, 'so close that the cords of the two tents were interlaced.' Christian hopes also soared with the news that Arghun's newborn son Khudabanda, the future il-khan Uljaitu (1304–16), had been baptised by a visiting Latin bishop.

An interesting perspective on the Nestorian Church during the tense final years of Arghun's reign was provided by the Dominican missionary Ricoldo de Monte Croce, who arrived in Baghdad in 1290. Ricoldo, a man of little subtlety, attempted to preach in Arabic in one of the Nestorian churches in the city. He was given a courteous hearing until he referred to the Virgin Mary as 'Mother of God'. At this point the scandalised Nestorians drove him from the church and sprinkled rose water over the pulpit which he had defiled with his blasphemy. Ricoldo complained that he had nowhere to worship and the Nestorians relented, allowing the heretical Frank to use their churches for his personal devotions on

condition that he made no further attempt to preach to them. Shortly after this incident Ricoldo had a revealing conversation with the patriarch Yahballaha III, who was making a visitation to the Nestorians of Baghdad. As a result of their recent contacts with the Latin Church, the leaders of the Church of the East had begun to appreciate how deeply they were misunderstood by other Christians because they called themselves Nestorians. Yahballaha therefore told Ricoldo that he was not a Nestorian, as he did not subscribe to the teachings of Nestorius. This line, which Yahballaha seems to have been the first to formulate, was soon taken up by the eminent theologian ‘Abdisho’ of Nisibis, and has been repeated by successive Nestorian patriarchs ever since. Yahballaha also told the Dominican missionary that he could preach in any of the Nestorian churches of Baghdad. The local clergy, however, knowing that the patriarch would soon be leaving Baghdad, put as many obstacles as they could in Ricoldo’s way.

Arghun died in March 1291 and was succeeded by his younger brother Geikhatu (1291–5). The new il-khan may have been inclined to continue Arghun’s policy, but by now plans for a joint campaign against the Mamluks had been overtaken by events. Between 1263 and 1291 the Mamluks gradually overran all the remaining Crusader possessions in Palestine. In 1291 Acre, the last major Crusader stronghold, fell to the Muslims, and the remaining cities still in Christian hands surrendered immediately afterwards. The Crusades had ended in complete Muslim victory, and Christian hopes of liberating the Holy Land from Muslim control were finally dashed. Despite this disaster, life remained comfortable for the Christians of the il-khanate during Geikhatu’s reign. He was a generous patron of his fellow-Christians, and normally ready to oblige Yahballaha III, who seems to have had great influence over him. Shortly after his accession he allowed the elderly Rabban Sawma to build a splendid church in Maragha, dedicated to Mar Mari and Mar Giwargis. It was Rabban Sawma’s last service to the Church of the East. He died in Erbil in January 1294. Yahballaha, who was at his old friend’s deathbed, left for Maragha in the spring of the same year, where he laid the foundations of a large new monastery dedicated to Saint John the Baptist two miles north of the city. Yahballaha evidently intended to move the patriarchal seat of the Church of the East from Baghdad to Maragha, but his plans were thrown into disarray by Geikhatu’s death in 1295. Geikhatu was succeeded by his Christian cousin Baidu, whose reign lasted only a few months. With the collapse of the Crusader states Islam was now clearly in the ascendant, and the Muslim majority made its feelings known. With little or no popular support, Baidu was killed in September 1295. He was succeeded by Arghun’s eldest son Ghazan (1295–1304), who had been raised a Christian but now made a timely conversion to Islam to smooth his path to the throne.

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With a Muslim prince again ruling in Persia and Iraq, the good times for the Christians came abruptly to an end.

The Persecution of Ghazan (1295–1304). Ghazan's victory was followed immediately by a persecution of Christians within his domains, particularly at Baghdad, Erbil, Mosul, Maragha, Tabriz and Hamadan. Responsibility for the persecution was entrusted to Nauraz, one of Ghazan's generals, and although (according to a Christian source) one of his edicts called for 'the churches to be uprooted, and the altars overturned, and the celebrations of the eucharist to cease, and the hymns of praise, and the sounds of calls to prayer to be abolished; and the heads of the Christians, and the great men among them, to be killed', there does not seem to have been much bloodshed. Instead, Nauraz concentrated on the destruction or confiscation of churches. The *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark* states that the recently-restored church of Mar Shallita in Maragha was destroyed, and in more general terms that all the churches in Erbil, Mosul, Tabriz and Hamadan were razed to their foundations.

The impression of wholesale destruction given in the *History* is exaggerated. The church of Mar Shallita in Maragha was again being used for worship in 1311, when it received an endowment from the emir Irinjin, and churches were also functioning in Erbil and Tabriz at about the same time, suggesting that while they may have been looted and damaged in the 1295 persecution, they had not been destroyed. Furthermore, the persecutors were prepared to spare churches in return for substantial bribes, and although Nestorian and Jacobite churches were destroyed in Erbil because the Christians could not find the money to redeem them, a bribe of 15,000 dinars was raised at Mosul by the sale of church plate and ornaments and by individual donations, and the city's churches were left undisturbed. At Maragha, a generous donation by the Armenian king Hayton II to a local Muslim official redeemed the Nestorian church of Mar Mari and Mar Giwargis from destruction. At Baghdad too, most churches were spared in return for bribes, though the Muslims converted into a mosque the church built by Makkikha II shortly after the city's capture by the Mongols and recovered the treasury building turned over to the Nestorian patriarch by Hulegu in 1258, thereby erasing these painful memories of the darkest days of Islam. The Nestorians were required to remove the remains of the patriarchs Makkikha II and Denha I for reburial elsewhere, but there was no attempt to desecrate their graves.

However, a special attempt was made to intimidate the Nestorian patriarch. In September 1295 a gang of Muslim thugs broke into Yahballaha's house in Maragha and emptied it of all its possessions. They then tortured the elderly patriarch, hanging him upside down and beating him on his legs and his back. During this

punishment he was told that the beatings would stop if he converted to Islam. The attackers then threatened to throw the patriarch from the roof of the house to his death. Most of Yahballaha's bishops and secretaries fled for their lives, and the few who remained with him were also roughed up. Finally, after receiving a bribe of 20,000 dinars, the Muslims left and plundered the great church in the city. Shortly afterwards an order for the execution of the patriarch arrived, but Yahballaha escaped and took refuge with Hayton II, who was providentially in Maragha at the time. Eventually he went to Tabriz and complained of his treatment to Ghazan. He was impatiently brushed off by the il-khan, and was again imprisoned in his own house in the early months of 1296.

The harassment of the Christians of the il-khanate, motivated mainly by greed on the part of the persecutors, lasted for a year. The Armenian king Hayton II, whose status as an ally gave him a certain amount of influence with Ghazan, eventually pleaded directly with the il-khan for an end to the persecution. Before the end of 1296 Ghazan issued an edict reaffirming the traditional status of the Christians as protected *dhimmis* and ordering the restitution of confiscated Christian property and possessions. The patriarch Yahballaha III was once again officially welcome at court, though he understandably avoided the il-khan's company as much as he could.

In Erbil the events of 1291 were repeated in 1297. The regular Mongol garrison was withdrawn to confront Nauraz, who had launched a rebellion in Khorasan, and the maintenance of law and order was entrusted to the unpopular Nestorian irregular cavalry, the *qayajaye*. One of the Christian troopers killed a Muslim during a brawl, and the city's Muslim population promptly rose in protest. The Kurds came down from their mountains to help them and the Christians again took refuge in the citadel, where they were blockaded by a mob of Arab and Kurdish Muslims. The Nestorian metropolitan of Erbil, Abraham, was captured during the rioting around the citadel, though on this occasion his office protected him from ill-treatment. The situation was resolved by the return of Ghazan from Khorasan, where he had defeated, captured and executed Nauraz. He asked Yahballaha III to persuade the Christians to surrender the citadel and return to their homes, but the patriarch demanded a guarantee for their safety. He reminded Ghazan how the churches had been destroyed by Nauraz in Maragha, Tabriz and Hamadan, and asked for Mongol regular troops to be stationed in Erbil to protect the Christians from their Muslim neighbours. It was eventually agreed that the Christians would remain in the citadel, fed at the state's expense, until the Mongols returned to Erbil in force. Mongol regular troops reoccupied Erbil in the winter of 1297, and the Christians then left the citadel. Although this agreement restored peace of a sort at Erbil, an edict was issued in the same year

ordering Christians to pay the poll tax and to wear distinctive girdles in public. The author of this edict was Nasr al-Din, a fanatical enemy of the Christians.

Yahballaha spent most of the next three years at the Mongol court in Maragha, dancing attendance on the il-khan Ghazan and supervising the construction of the monastery of Saint John the Baptist. The monastery was consecrated in September 1301, and the anonymous author of the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark* devoted several pages to a description of its many splendours. In the spring of 1303 Ghazan complimented Yahballaha by donating to the monastery a valuable cross which had recently been sent to him by Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303). Elsewhere in the il-khanate, however, relations between the Muslims and the Christians were not so cordial. Later in the same year the emir Irinjin was forced to intervene to prevent the Muslims of Tabriz from confiscating the city's Nestorian church and converting it into a mosque.

Yahballaha's leisurely residence in Maragha gave him time to correspond with the Vatican, and in 1304 he wrote a celebrated letter in which he unreservedly pledged his obedience to the pope. This letter, which set pulses racing in Rome, has sometimes been claimed as evidence that, two and a half centuries before the conversion of the Nestorian patriarch Yohannan Sulaqa to Catholicism in 1553, Yahballaha III had also become a Catholic. Since Yahballaha had been at pains to point out to Ricoldo de Monte Croce several years previously that the faith of the Nestorians was orthodox, this seems unlikely. Yahballaha, in fact, was seeking Christian allies at a time of increasing uncertainty, and conciliated his audience with a little harmless flattery. He did indeed admit in his letter the theoretical primacy of the See of Peter, but in common courtesy he was bound to do so. The patriarchate of Rome, after all, had been founded by one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, not by the second-generation apostle Mari. But his pledge of obedience to the Roman Church hardly went further than recognising its superior claim to an apostolic foundation. He certainly did not enter into any meaningful union with the Roman Church. The colophon of a Nestorian manuscript copied in India in 1301, three years before Yahballaha wrote to the Vatican, illustrates what the Nestorians really thought of their Church. The manuscript was written:

in the time of the great governor, the holder of the key of the Holy Apostolic Church of the East, the bright lamp illuminating its territories, the chief of the chief priests, the father of fathers, our blessed and holy father Mar Yahballaha the Fifth (*sic*), the Turk, catholicus patriarch of the East, the chief region of the world, which guides and illuminates the other regions; who stands above

the universal Church like a lampstand, giving light to all its servants and dispelling its fears.

The Massacre at Erbil (1310). Ghazan was succeeded by Arghun's son Uljaitu (1304–16). Uljaitu had been baptised as a Christian as an infant but had been brought up as a good Muslim. Christian hopes that he would be a sympathetic ruler were to prove unfounded. During his reign events in the Middle East moved inexorably in favour of Islam. A Mongol defeat at Rahbat in Syria in 1312 ended once and for all the prospect of an alliance between the Mongols and the Christian powers against the Mamluks, and confirmed the verdict of 'Ain Jalut. Twenty years after the collapse of the Crusader states, the Christian kings of Western Europe were in no mood to throw good money after bad, and the last overtures from the Mongols and from Hayton II of Cilician Armenia were politely rebuffed.

Islam was everywhere victorious, and from Iraq to Georgia the Muslim majority took a belated revenge on the Christians for the support they had given the Mongols in 1258. Uljaitu himself was tolerant, and remained on friendly terms with the patriarch Yahballaha III, but he was unable to prevent Muslim antipathy to the Christians breaking out in various parts of his kingdom. The most serious incident was a deliberate massacre of Christians in Erbil in 1310 by one of Uljaitu's emirs, a lengthy account of which has been preserved in the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*. The *History's* account of this tragedy, which shows both Christians and Muslims at their best and at their worst, demonstrates that the il-khans and their advisers were not always in control of events.

As in 1290, the violence at Erbil was sparked by the *qayajaye*, the irregular Christian cavalry in the Mongol service, who refused to obey orders until they received arrears of pay. Uljaitu ordered Nasr al-Din, the author of the persecutions of 1297, to resolve the matter, and Nasr al-Din took advantage of this opportunity to recover the fortress of Erbil from the Christians. He placed the citadel under siege, outlawed the *qayajaye* and demanded their surrender. The mountaineers ignored this summons and held their ground in the citadel, as they had on two previous occasions. They were joined by most of Erbil's Christians, terrified that they would be victimised by the Arabs once the fighting started. Yahballaha III was living in the citadel at this time, but was ordered by Uljaitu to leave.

Nasr al-Din and his supporters knew that most of Uljaitu's closest advisers, including the vizier Rashid al-Din and the head of the divan Choban, wanted a peaceful resolution of the dispute, and realised that they would have to move quickly if they used force against the Christians in the citadel. Anything that weakened the defence and shortened the siege was therefore welcome, and Yahballaha was asked to urge the *qayajaye* to evacuate the citadel peacefully. On 15

March 1310 a delegation of Nestorian clerics led by the metropolitan Ishoʿsabran of Erbil persuaded the *qayajaye* to leave the citadel the following morning in exchange for safe conduct and some of the back pay they were owed. Ishoʿsabran had negotiated in good faith, but Nasr al-Din had no intention of honouring the pledges he had given. As the first mountaineers left the gate of the citadel, they were met with a shower of arrows. Drawn swords flashed in the sun and yelling Arab soldiers ran out from ambush. The trap was sprung too soon. After a desperate skirmish around the gate which left twelve Christians and three Muslims dead, the Christians fought their way back into the citadel. The Arabs tried to carry the citadel by assault, but were repelled with Greek fire by its defenders.

Foiled in their attempt to capture the citadel by treachery, the Arabs destroyed four Christian churches in Erbil and pillaged the residence of the Nestorian metropolitan. A number of Christians were also killed. Some of them were *qayajaye* prisoners who were now executed as rebels in arms, but others were innocent civilians. Some Christians escaped the witch hunt by taking shelter with Muslim friends. Nasr al-Din settled down to a regular siege of the citadel, and his forces were joined by the Kurds, who had their own score to settle with the *qayajaye*. The Muslim commander now had little choice but to try to starve the defenders out, and he posted notices in Erbil and the surrounding villages threatening death to any Christian who attempted to supply the rebels with either food or weapons. These warnings were necessary, as Christian villages in the region were already donating money to buy arms to be smuggled into the citadel.

Yahballaha guessed that Nasr al-Din's reports to Uljaitu were laying the blame for events entirely on the Christians, and did his best to ensure that the il-khan was informed of the true state of affairs. On his instructions Ishoʿsabran of Erbil made a long and difficult journey to the royal court at Sultaniyya, where he convinced the il-khan that a distinction should be made between the rebellious *qayajaye* and the innocent Christian civilians who had taken refuge in the citadel because they were in fear of their lives. Uljaitu ordered that the two sides should be reconciled, and that a safe conduct should be given to Christian civilians who left the citadel. It soon became clear that Nasr al-Din had no intention of obeying these orders, and Choban despatched the emir Gaijak with a company of Mongol cavalry to Erbil to avert the threatened massacre of the Christians. Unaware that this expedition was on its way, Nasr al-Din increased the pressure on the defenders of the citadel in the second half of June. Despite the formal courtesies which the besiegers occasionally paid Yahballaha, the patriarch had for the last three months been little more than a prisoner in their hands. On 27 June, at Nasr al-Din's request, he arranged a truce and persuaded around 300 men, women and children to leave the citadel. Nasr al-Din, pleading a breach of

the truce by the *qayajaye*, promptly had them killed. Yahballaha protested angrily, but ineffectually, at this breach of faith.

The remaining Christians in the fortress waited for the end. Demoralised and hungry, they must have despaired of their lives after this massacre. But on 28 June new hope was kindled. A messenger arrived from Gaijak. He brought the news that the emir was making with all speed for Erbil, and relayed an order from Choban that the Christians were to be brought down from the citadel peacefully. Impressed by his assurances, several hundred Christians laid down their arms and withdrew to the nearby village of 'Ainqawa under a safe conduct. But the messenger had underestimated Nasr al-Din's ruthlessness. On 30 June the emir sent a force of Arab soldiers to 'Ainqawa, who massacred the Christian refugees.

The last act in the drama came quickly. Gaijak and his cavalry were still on the road to Erbil, and Nasr al-Din overwhelmed the starving Christian remnant in the fortress before they arrived. Stripped of most of its defenders, the citadel was assaulted and taken by the Arabs on 1 July. The surviving *qayajaye* were thrown from the walls onto the swords of soldiers below. The other Christians captured in the citadel, including the women, were sold into slavery. The fortress was garrisoned by Muslim troops, and the city's Christians from then on were entirely dependent on the sufferance of their Muslim neighbours. Nasr al-Din escaped without even a reprimand. He had flagrantly ignored Uljaitu's instructions, but in the eyes of the Muslims of Erbil he was a hero of Islam. Whatever his personal feelings, the il-khan judged it best to overlook his disobedience.

The tragedy broke Yahballaha's heart. Immediately after the capture of the fortress of Erbil he and his bishops rode east to Beth Sayyade to take refuge with Choban and Gaijak, whom they rewarded for their support. Later in July Yahballaha went to the Mongol court intending to denounce Nasr al-Din to Uljaitu, but the il-khan made it clear that the subject was closed. The two men toasted one another, as so often before, but Uljaitu declined to enter into conversation with Yahballaha. The patriarch withdrew to the monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Maragha, where he remained in virtual seclusion until his death in November 1317. Although the il-khan granted him an annual pension and bestowed on him the revenues of some villages in the neighbourhood of Baghdad, he never saw Uljaitu again. 'I am weary', he said, 'of serving the Mongols'.

ECCLESIASTICAL ORGANISATION

Stability and Change. Between the fifth and the fourteenth centuries the Church of the East was organised into a province of the patriarch, half a dozen Mesopotamian

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'provinces of the interior' whose metropolitans formed the electoral college, and around a dozen 'exterior' provinces extending eastwards through Persia and Central Asia to India and China and westwards to Syria, Palestine, Cilicia and Egypt. Although some dioceses lapsed and others were created during this millennium, there were probably between 80 and 120 Nestorian dioceses at any single point in time during this long period. The provincial structure of the Church of the East at the end of the thirteenth century descended directly from the structure established at the synod of Isaac in 410, and many of the dioceses which existed in 1300 had also existed, though perhaps under a different name, nine hundred years earlier.

The apparent stability of the episcopal organisation of the Church of the East during this long millennium is in fact misleading. Significant demographic changes took place during this period which are only indirectly, if at all, reflected in the organisational structure of the Church. The most significant of these changes were the gradual elimination of Christianity in Arabia and Fars, and the drift of Christians from the southern provinces of Maishan, Elam, Beth Aramaye and Beth Garmai to northern Mesopotamia in response to the gradual islamisation of the lower Tigris and Euphrates valleys. The Church of the East enjoyed a brief and superficial recovery during the second half of the thirteenth century under the Mongols, and the consecration of Yahballaha III in 1281 was attended by probably the largest gathering of bishops in its history. In fact the Nestorian Church was considerably weaker at the end of the thirteenth century than at its beginning. Many Nestorian dioceses in Central Asia suffered heavy losses at the hands of the Mongols in the second decade of the thirteenth century. The Nestorian Church also continued to decline in southern Mesopotamia throughout the thirteenth century, while consolidating and strengthening its position in northern Mesopotamia and Adarbaigan. In the literary sources for this period, Baghdad is mentioned mainly as the traditional venue for the enthronement of a new patriarch. The important Nestorian centres in the second half of the thirteenth century were Mosul and Erbil and the towns of Maragha, Urmia, Eshnuq and Tabriz, which enjoyed a period of prosperity under the Mongol il-khans.

The Mesopotamian Provinces. The trend of decline in the province of the patriarch continued in the thirteenth century. The diocese of Zabe and Nil is last mentioned during the reign of Yahballaha II (1190–1222), and the diocese of ʿUkbara in 1222. Only three dioceses are known to have been still in existence at the end of the thirteenth century: Beth Waziq, Radhan and Tirhan. The Nestorian diocese of Tirhan could not be allowed to lapse as long as the Jacobites were still entrenched in Tagrit. The diocese of Beth Waziq, which had absorbed the old diocese of

Shenna d'Beth Ramman, may also have remained in existence to give comfort to the Nestorian population of a predominantly Jacobite district. The diocese of Radhan seems to have survived under a different name. Several thirteenth-century bishops of the hitherto-unattested diocese of Beth Daron are known, and it has been plausibly argued that Radhan and Beth Daron were two names for the same diocese. Only two functioning monasteries (Dorqoni near Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Mar Yonan near Anbar) are attested in Beth Aramaye during the Mongol period, and although small Nestorian communities may have persisted in some districts which no longer had bishops, they cannot have been significant.

In the province of Elam, where Christianity was ebbing fast, only the archdiocese of Jundishapur certainly survived into the fourteenth century. For what it was worth, its archbishop enjoyed greater prestige than ever. Elam had for centuries ranked first among the metropolitan provinces of the Church of the East, and its metropolitan had long enjoyed the privilege of consecrating a new patriarch and sitting at his right hand at synods. By 1222, owing to the demise of the diocese of Kashkar, he had also acquired the privilege of guarding the vacant patriarchal throne. Susa and Shushter, the sole remaining suffragan dioceses in the province of Elam, are last mentioned in 1281, when their bishops attended the consecration of Yahballaha III.

In the province of Nisibis, a diocese was founded around the middle of the thirteenth century to the north of the Tur 'Abdin for the town of Hesna d'Kifa, perhaps in response to Christian immigration to the towns of the Tigris plain during the disorders of the times. A bishop named Yohannan from the otherwise-unattested diocese of 'Kamul' was present at the consecration of the patriarch Denha I in 1265. The French scholar Paul Pelliot, by a heroic stretch of the imagination, identified Kamul with the oasis of 'Qamul' in eastern Turkestan mentioned by Marco Polo, but it is far more likely to have been a diocese in Mesopotamia. The diocese may have been connected with the monastery of Mar Yohannan of Beth Garmai, near the town of Tamanon in the Gazarta region, which was also known as the monastery of Kamul. At the same time, a number of older dioceses may have ceased to exist. The dioceses of Qaimar and Qarta and Adarma are last mentioned towards the end of the twelfth century and the diocese of Tamanon in 1265, and it is not clear whether they persisted into the fourteenth century. The only dioceses in the province of Nisibis definitely in existence at the end of the thirteenth century were Arzun, Gazarta, Balad, Shigar, Akhlāt and Maiperqat.

The archdioceses of Mosul and Erbil definitely persisted into the fourteenth century, as did the dioceses of Hnitha and Marga, though the latter diocese was renamed Tella and Barbelli in the second half of the thirteenth century, after two

large villages in the Marga district. The diocese of Hebton may also have survived to the end of the thirteenth century, though the evidence is uncertain. The diocese is last mentioned under that name in 1257, when its bishop Gabriel was present at the consecration of the patriarch Makkikha II; but according to the fourteenth-century historian Sliba the bishop Gabriel of Beth Rustaqa ('al-Rustaq'), a diocese not otherwise attested, attended the consecration of the patriarch Yahballaha III in 1281. The name Beth Rustaqa was later associated with the Shemsdin district of Hakkari, which at this period was divided between the dioceses of Beth Bgash and Hebton, and was very probably another name for Hebton. On this view, the bishop Gabriel of Hebton made the tiring journey to Baghdad in 1257 for the consecration of Makkikha II, skipped the consecration of Denha I in 1265, but paid a second visit to Baghdad in 1281, now perhaps in his seventies or eighties, to witness the unforgettable splendours of Yahballaha's consecration. The dioceses of Beth Nuhadra, Beth Bgash and Beth Dasen may also have survived into the fourteenth century, though this is by no means certain. The last-known bishops of these three dioceses, Malkisho^c of Beth Nuhadra, Isho^czkha of Beth Bgash and Mattai of Beth Dasen, were present at the consecration of Denha I in 1265. Mattai of Beth Dasen was also present at Yahballaha III's consecration in 1281, but no bishops seem to have been present on that occasion from Beth Nuhadra and Beth Bgash.

Christianity continued to decline in the province of Beth Garmai. None of its seven or eight known suffragan dioceses survived into the Mongol period, though its metropolitan continued to sit in solitary splendour at Daquqa. The clerks of the patriarchal cell in Maragha evidently noticed that he no longer had any suffragans, as the province seems to have been stripped of its metropolitan status during the reign of Yahballaha III. The metropolitan Eliya of Beth Garmai was present at the consecration of the patriarchs Denha I in 1265 and Yahballaha III in 1281, but at the consecration of Yahballaha's successor Timothy II in 1318 Beth Garmai was represented by a mere bishop, Shem^con.

The migration of Christians from southern Mesopotamia led to a revival of Christianity in the province of Adarbaigan, where Christians could practise their religion freely under Mongol protection. According to the Armenian historian Kirakos of Ganzak, the Mongol occupation of Adarbaigan enabled churches to be built in Tabriz and Nakhichevan for the first time in their history; and it is clear from Bar Hebraeus and other thirteenth-century sources that a substantial number of Nestorian, Jacobite and Armenian Christians moved to Nakhichevan, Tabriz, Maragha and Urmia shortly after they became Mongol cantonments in the 1240s. Their numbers are not known, but it may be significant that in 1286, when Yahballaha III arranged the funeral of Bar Hebraeus, he was only able to

assemble around 200 Nestorian, Greek and Armenian Christians for this important occasion. All three Churches consecrated bishops for their own communities. The Church of the East responded by creating a new metropolitan province of Adarbaigan. Although this province was named after the long-defunct Nestorian diocese centred on Ganzak, the thirteenth-century metropolitans of Adarbaigan almost certainly sat at Tabriz. In 1265 the metropolitan Yohannan of Adarbaigan was present at the consecration of the patriarch Denha I. He seems to have had at least three suffragan bishops. Urmia had been the seat of a Nestorian bishop as early as 1074, and two other Nestorian dioceses were created in the Urmia region before the end of the thirteenth century, for Eshnuq and Salmas. Bishops of both dioceses were present at the consecration of the patriarch Yahballaha III in 1281. Two tombstone inscriptions from the cemetery in the Salmas village of Khosrowa attest to the presence of Nestorian Christians in Khosrowa as early as the seventh century, but their numbers were probably small. Certainly, there is no evidence for a Nestorian diocese for the Salmas district before the Mongol period.

The Urmia region, which in the nineteenth century accounted for nearly a third of the total East Syrian population of Iraq and Iran, was probably settled in force by Nestorian migrants during the second half of the thirteenth century. The region already had a number of Nestorian settlements, but its Christian population increased dramatically at an unknown period between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is often argued that the Urmia region was settled as a result of a 'flight to the mountains' at the end of the fourteenth century, as the Christians of the Tigris plain sought shelter from the armies of Timur Leng. While there is no need to doubt that there was a substantial movement of Nestorian Christians into the Urmia region in the 1390s, the creation of dioceses for Salmas and Eshnuq in the 1260s or slightly earlier demonstrates that significant numbers of Christians were moving there long before Timur's day. The frequent clashes between Muslims and Christians during the reigns of Denha I and Yahballaha III probably encouraged Christians to leave Baghdad, Mosul and Erbil and build new lives among their own people in the fertile farmlands of the Urmia plain.

The Exterior Provinces. The impact of the Mongol conquests in the first half of the thirteenth century on the Nestorian communities of Fars, Media, Khorasan and Central Asia was mixed. Fars was spared by the Mongols for its timely submission in the 1220s, but by then its Christian population was probably very small. The Church of the East was no longer sending bishops to Fars, and it is doubtful whether there were any Christians left in the mainland cities by the end of the thirteenth century. A Nestorian remnant survived in the cosmopolitan trading port of Hormuz, but without a bishop. Soqotra too survived as an isolated

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outpost of Christianity in the Indian Ocean, and a Nestorian bishop from the island attended the consecration of Yahballaha III in 1281. Hamadan, which still had a significant Nestorian community and was the seat of the metropolitans of Hulwan at the end of the twelfth century, was sacked in 1220. The city was also the scene of anti-Christian riots in the last decade of the thirteenth century. These riots drove the Christian population out, and in 1297 Yahballaha III claimed that it was no longer possible even to point to the site where the city's Nestorian church had once stood. In Khorasan and Segestan, Nestorians and Jacobites alike suffered a crushing blow during the Mongol invasions. The cities of Merv, Nishapur and Herat were stormed by Genghis Khan in 1220 and their inhabitants were massacred. Although all three cities were refounded shortly afterwards, they probably had only small Nestorian Christian communities thereafter. Tus still had a bishop towards the end of the thirteenth century, but may have been the sole surviving diocese in Khorasan. The Christian communities in Central Asia may have weathered the Mongol storm more successfully. Samarqand, the metropolitan diocese of Beth Turkaye, surrendered to Genghis Khan in 1220. Although many of its citizens were killed the city was not destroyed, and Marco Polo mentioned a Nestorian community in Samarqand in the 1270s. The city's Nestorian monastery of Saint John the Baptist, famed for a pillar which stood apparently unsupported several inches above the floor, was mentioned both by Marco Polo and by the fourteenth-century Chinese local historian Yu Chi-lu, who was told about it by some Nestorian monks then living in China.

Not much is known about the Nestorians of Central Asia and Mongolia, as any records of their history perished in the fourteenth century, when Christianity was virtually wiped out throughout the region. The little that is known derives from the accounts of European diplomats, missionaries and merchants whose business took them on the hard, and often dangerous, journey to the Mongol capitals in the middle and late thirteenth century. The most notable accounts were written by the papal legate John of Plano Carpini and the Armenian grandee Sempad the Constable, who were both present at the coronation of Kuyuk in 1246; by the Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck, who visited Mongke's court at Karakorum in 1253; and by the Venetian merchant Marco Polo, who remained several years at the court of Khubilai at Khanbalik in the 1280s. All four travellers encountered Nestorian Christians frequently during their journeys, and their accounts provide a valuable glimpse of the life led by the Turkish Christians of the provinces of Samarqand and Kashgar and Nevaketh during the Mongol period.

Like their counterparts in northern Mesopotamia, the Christians of Central Asia were a minority of the population, and lived apart from their Buddhist and Muslim neighbours in tight village communities. In December 1253 William of

Rubruck and his companions came across a village not far to the south of Lake Balkash, which was inhabited entirely by Nestorian Christians. 'We entered their church singing joyfully and at the tops of our voices *'Salve, regina!'* for it had been a long time since we saw a church,' William remarked. This comment suggests that such villages may have been few and far between. William was unimpressed by the Nestorian priests he encountered on his travels. Their sacred texts were in Syriac, but it was a second language for them, which they read with difficulty and made no pretence of speaking fluently. Rather like certain European monks of William's acquaintance who had similar difficulties with Latin, they chanted the Syriac church offices by rote. The minor grammatical mistakes noticed by scholars in many of the Syriac tombstone inscriptions from Central Asia bear out William's observation. The Nestorian monk Sargis, an Armenian whom William met a few days later at Mongke's court in Karakorum, was better educated than these humble village priests but had other faults. He was a braggart, a charlatan and a miser. He once swore to cure Mongke's wife of an illness or die in the attempt. William, alarmed, had to add holy water to the powdered rhubarb which the Nestorian had prescribed. On another occasion he passed himself off as a bishop, the better to impress the Mongols. On a third occasion, when food was running critically short in the Mongol camp, he concealed a box of fruits under his altar, and surreptitiously nibbled raisins from this hoard while others went hungry. In other circumstances William would gladly have shunned this dreadful Oriental, but in remote Karakorum, where Christians were few, he resigned himself to his company 'for the honour of the cross'. Sadly, William did not mention how he himself struck the Nestorians. Perhaps they found his disapproving manner equally irritating.

In 1301 a manuscript was copied in the church of Mar Quriagos in Cranganore on the Malabar Coast of India. An elaborate colophon to this manuscript mentions the patriarch Yahballaha III and the metropolitan Ya'qob of India, demonstrating that links between the Saint Thomas Christians and the Church of the East in Mesopotamia were strong at this period. Cranganore, described in the colophon as 'the royal city', was evidently the seat of the Nestorian metropolitans of India, indicating that the main strength of the Indian Christians was by now along the Malabar Coast. Nevertheless, there were still Nestorian communities at this period around Bombay and on the Coromandel Coast, around Madras and in Meliapur, with its celebrated tomb of Saint Thomas. Their numbers, however, were modest. The Latin missionaries mentioned only fifteen Nestorian families in Tana, a port near Bombay, and another fifteen families in Meliapur.

The Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century allowed the Nestorians to return to China, and by the end of the century two new metropolitan provinces

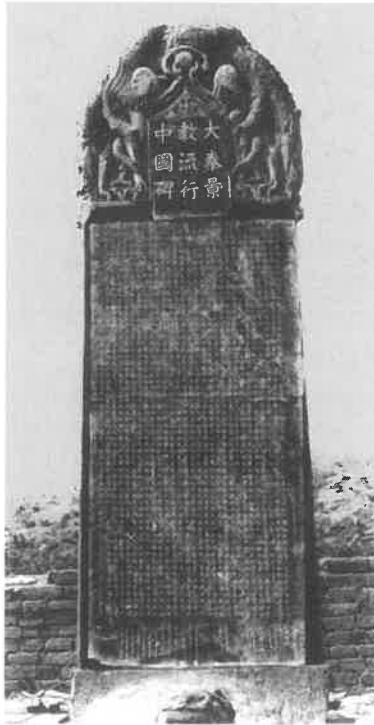
had been created for China, Tangut and 'Katai and Ong'. The province of Tangut was roughly co-extensive with the modern provinces of Sinkiang and Kansu in northwest China, and its metropolitan seems to have sat at Almaliq. According to Bar Hebraeus, the metropolitan Shem'on Bar Qaligh of Tangut was arrested by Denha I shortly before his death in 1281 'together with a number of his bishops', implying that the province had several dioceses. The province of Katai and Ong covered northern China and the country of the Christian Ongut tribe (called Ongaye in Syriac) around the great bend of the Yellow River, and its metropolitans resided in the Mongol capital Khanbaliq. The name 'Katai' ('Cathay') derives from the Kara Khitai tribe, whose empire in Central Asia was destroyed by the Mongols during the second decade of the thirteenth century. The patriarch Yahballaha III grew up in a monastery on the northern borders of China in the 1270s, and the metropolitans Giwargis and Nestorius of Katai and Ong are mentioned in his biography. The Ongut king Giwargis, a Nestorian Christian, is mentioned several times in the contemporary sources, and recent excavations appear to have uncovered one of his royal palaces. In 1298, almost certainly on the initiative of the patriarch Yahballaha III, a magnificent Syriac evangelary in gold ink on indigo paper was copied for the edification of the Ongut princess Sarah, the king's sister. This sumptuous royal gift, now among the treasures of the Vatican, was probably inspired by comparable deluxe editions of the Qur'an, and has survived only because it never left northern Mesopotamia. Conditions, perhaps, were too unsettled at the end of the thirteenth century to send it on so hazardous a journey.

The locations of the suffragan dioceses of the metropolitan provinces of Tangut and Katai and Ong are not known, though it is possible to make certain deductions from the locations of the Latin dioceses in China in the fourteenth century. The metropolitan of Katai and Ong doubtless had a suffragan bishop in the Ongut capital Tung-sheng, and as the province of Katai and Ong was also known as 'Khanbaliq and al-Faliq', it is a reasonable conclusion that al-Faliq was the Arabic name for Tung-sheng. There were clearly other dioceses in northern China, as William of Rubruck mentioned a Nestorian bishop of 'Segin' in 1253. 'Segin' is the modern town of Ta-t'ung in Shansi province, then known as Hsi-ching, 'the western capital'. The coastal ports of Ch'uan-chou and Hangchow in southern China are obvious residences for Nestorian bishops of Katai, as there were Latin dioceses in these thriving trading cities during the fourteenth century. Indeed, one of several Christian tombstones discovered in Ch'uan-chou in recent years records the death of a Nestorian bishop named Shlemun in 1313, whose jurisdiction covered 'Manzi' (southern China). Marco Polo had earlier reported the presence of a large Manichean community in Fukien province, whose leaders



1 *The Cross of Saint Thomas, Meliapur*

A mid-twentieth-century photograph of a Nestorian cross discovered in 1547 at Meliapur on the Coromandel Coast, long claimed by Indian Christians as the site of the martyrdom of Saint Thomas. Several Nestorian 'crosses of Saint Thomas' have turned up in India. Most of them, as might be expected, are associated with the Christian communities of the Malabar Coast, but crosses have also been found further afield, at Anuradhapura in Ceylon and at Taxila in Pakistan. Many of the crosses have accompanying inscriptions, mostly either in Pahlavi or Malayalam. The Pahlavi inscriptions have generally been dated to the sixth or seventh centuries, and predate the reorganisation of the Indian Church by Timothy I (780–823). One cross, from Kottayam, has a tenth-century Syriac inscription: 'But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Galatians 6:14).



2 *The Sian Tablet*

The celebrated 'Nestorian Stele', erected in 781 in the grounds of a Nestorian monastery in the I-ning ward of the Chinese capital Ch'ang-an (modern Sian). The stele was rediscovered in 1625, and for the next two centuries was believed by many scholars to be a Jesuit forgery. Its authenticity is now beyond doubt, but was only generally admitted in the second half of the nineteenth century. The title of the inscription, clearly visible in this photograph, reads *Ta-ch'in ching-chiao liu-hsing Chung-kuo pei*, 'The Tablet of the Spread of the Syrian Brilliant Teaching in China'. A tableau above this nine-character inscription depicts the Christian cross raised in triumph above the clouds of Taoism and the Buddhist lotus.

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3 *The Nestorian Patriarch Shem'on XVIII Rubil (1861–1903)*

The Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XVIII Rubil (1861–1903), who flirted with the various American and European missions throughout his reign but refused to commit himself either to the Protestants or to the Catholics. His evasive tactics gave him considerable influence with the foreign missions, but won him few friends. Most of the missionaries considered him to be frivolous and feckless. The photograph was taken in Kochanes in 1886.



4 *The Deacon Eshai d'Mar Shem'on with His Attendants, c.1895*

The deacon Eshai d'Mar Shem'on, the brother of the patriarch Shem'on XVIII Rubil (1861–1903) and the father of the patriarch Shem'on XIX Benjamin (1903–18). Eshai's flamboyant dress and attendant bodyguards reflect his pride in his status as a close relative of the patriarch. Shamasha Eshai died of fever in 1897, and was buried in the church of Mart Maryam in the Urmia village of Charbash. This splendid photograph, now in the Library of Congress, was probably taken by one of the American missionaries based at Urmia. The photo was mistakenly captioned 'A Nestorian archbishop in Persia', probably because the anonymous annotator was misled by Eshai's superb appearance and air of authority. The bodyguards are from the Nochiya tribe of the Shemsdin and Tergawar districts and carry rifles of Russian make.



5 *'Turbulent Priests': Some Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Patriarchs of the Church of the East*

Four of the key players in the history of the Nestorian and Chaldean Churches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Clockwise, from left, the photographs show (i) the Nestorian patriarch Shemʿon XVII Abraham (1820–60), whose betrayal of the Kurds in 1842 provoked a Kurdish invasion of Tiyyari and Tkhuma; (ii) the Chaldean patriarch Joseph VI Audo (1848–79), who crossed swords with the Vatican on numerous occasions during his three-decade reign; (iii) the Nestorian patriarch Shemʿon XIX Benjamin (1903–18), who ordered the murder of his brother Nimrod in 1915 and was himself murdered by the Kurdish brigand Ismaʿil Simko in 1918; and (iv) the Nestorian patriarch Shemʿon XXI Eshai (1920–75), who was murdered in California after announcing his intention to marry, in defiance of the canon law of the Church of the East.

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6 A Modern Assyrian Grape Festival

Christian life in late-twentieth-century Iran. Assyrian Christians from the village of Digala in the Urmia plain celebrate the grape harvest outside the village's church of Mart Maryam. This carefree scene was sketched by the British artist Richard A. Ewan in 1993. The Austrian traveller Anna Hafner Forneris noted in 1840 that the Nestorians of the Urmia region were fond of their wine, as were their priests. Most of the Assyrian and Chaldean Christians of the Urmia region abandoned their villages in the final months of the First World War and fled for safety to Iraq. Many of the refugees were later able to return to Iran, and several of the larger Christian villages, including Digala, were resettled; but the Christian population of the Urmia plain is considerably lower now than it was a century ago.

petitioned the great khan Khubilai to be classified as a Christian rather than a 'pagan' community (presumably there were certain perks attached to this status), and Shlemun's epitaph states that he had been responsible for administering both the Christians and the Manicheans of his extensive diocese. He doubtless sat in Ch'uan-chou, where his tombstone was discovered. Chinkiang and Yang-chou, where there was also a Latin church, may also have had Nestorian bishops. The large cities of Liang-chou and Su-chou in Kansu province, both of which had Christian communities mentioned by Marco Polo, are plausible locations for suffragan dioceses in the province of Tangut.

The Western Provinces. The thirteenth century was an unsettled period for the surviving Nestorian communities in the West, particularly for the Nestorians of Palestine, who seem to have moved from city to city as the last Crusader strongholds were mopped up by the Mamluks. It is unlikely that Egypt and Cilicia still had Nestorian bishops at this period, though small Nestorian communities could still be found in several cities ruled by the Franks. Jacques de Vitry, the Latin bishop of Acre, mentioned that the outbreak of the Fifth Crusade in 1217 had attracted a group of Nestorians to the Egyptian port of Damietta, one of the Crusaders' main objectives. Damietta fell to the Franks in 1219 after a two-year siege, and the Nestorians may well have established a Christian colony there. The Latin bishop evidently had long conversations with these Nestorian migrants, as his correspondence with the Vatican between 1217 and 1221 attests to his growing familiarity with the history of the Nestorian Church. His contemporary Oliver of Cologne visited a Nestorian church in Antioch, also in Christian hands, and courteously declined to speculate on whether the Nestorians were heretics. Perhaps the Nestorians of Syria were more disingenuous than their counterparts elsewhere in the Latin East, as in 1237 the Dominican missionary William of Montferrat, having failed to persuade the patriarch Sabrisho^c V to convert to Catholicism, claimed to have won over the Nestorian metropolitan of Damascus, who was making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Pope Gregory IX wrote enthusiastically to this renegade, whose supposed conversion is not mentioned in the Nestorian sources, congratulating him on finding salvation in the Roman Church and urging him to bring over his heretical flock as well. In Palestine, Jerusalem fell definitively to the Muslims in 1240, and its remaining Christians seem to have migrated to the Crusader strongholds of Acre and Tripolis. In 1246 the Nestorian periodeut Rabban Shem^con wrote to Pope Innocent IV, commending to his care the Nestorians living under Frankish rule in Antioch, Acre and Tripolis. By 1281, Jerusalem was a Nestorian diocese only by courtesy. Although the metropolitan Abraham of 'Jerusalem and Tripolis' attended the

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enthronement of the patriarch Yahballaha III in that year, he almost certainly sat at Tripolis, not Jerusalem.

Little is known of the Nestorian community in Tripolis, which fell to the Mamluks in 1289, but several sources mention the Nestorians of Acre. For precisely a century, from its capture by Richard Coeur de Lion in 1191 until its final fall to the Muslims in 1291, Acre was the most important city of the Latin East. For most of the thirteenth century it was also the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and both Jews and Syrian Christians could be found in significant numbers in the city. It is clear from a Frankish edict issued shortly after the city's capture in 1191 that Eastern Christians flocked to Acre once it was no longer in Muslim hands. This edict confined Jews, Samaritans and Syrian Christians to Mont Musard, Acre's unfashionable and unfortified northern suburb, and required them to trade there in an 'upper market' instead of in the 'lower market' in the city's old quarter. The edict mentioned 'Greeks, Syrians, Jacobites, Nestorians, Mosuliot, Armenians and other Syrian languages'. The 'Mosuliot' were Marco Polo's *mussolini*, the Nestorian and Jacobite merchants who traded in spices and muslin, the celebrated cloth from Mosul. As merchants, they naturally preferred to advertise their city rather than their religion. After the city's fall in 1291 most of Acre's merchants moved to Cyprus, and by the end of the thirteenth century Famagusta had replaced Acre as the main centre for European trade with the Middle East. Acre's Nestorians certainly joined the exodus to Famagusta, as Cyprus had a Nestorian bishop in the fourteenth century.

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Decline and Consolidation. When the monks Rabban Sawma and Mark (the future patriarch Yahballaha III) arrived in Mesopotamia from China in the late 1270s, they visited several Nestorian monasteries:

They arrived in Baghdad, and from there they went to the great church of Kokhe, and to the monastery of Mar Mari the apostle, and received a blessing from the relics of that country. From there they turned back and came to the country of Beth Garmai and they received blessings from the shrine of Mar Ezekiel, which was full of helps and healings. From there they went to Erbil, and from there to Mosul. They went on to Shigar, and Nisibis and Mardin, and were blessed by the shrine containing the bones of Mar Awgin, the second Christ. From there they went to Gazarta d'Beth Zabdai,

and they were blessed by all the shrines and monasteries, and the religious houses, and the monks, and the fathers in their dioceses.

With the exception of Dorqoni in Beth Aramaye, which boasted the tomb of the legendary apostle Mar Mari, the monasteries on their itinerary were well to the north of Baghdad. After visiting the monastery of Mar Ezekiel near Daquqa, the two Ongut monks would have gone on to see the monastery of Beth Qoqa near Erbil, the monasteries of Mar Mikha'il, Mar Eliya and Rabban Hormizd near Mosul, the monasteries of Mar Yohannan the Egyptian and Mar Ahha the Egyptian near Gazarta, and the monastery of Mar Awgin near Nisibis.

This passage is an eloquent testimony to the decline of Nestorian Christianity in its Mesopotamian heartland. Nestorian missionaries might have been active in China during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but in Iraq the Nestorians were gradually being driven back into the northern Mesopotamian redoubt to which they would be later confined. It is doubtful whether there were any monasteries left in Beth Huzaye, Maishan or Fars. Certainly, no contemporary text mentions any. The tomb of Mar Mari could still be admired by pilgrims to Dorqoni, but the only other monastery in Beth Aramaye that still showed signs of life during the Mongol period was the monastery of Mar Yonan near Anbar, where a manuscript was copied in 1276 by a monk named Giwargis, nearly a century and a half after the last mention of a bishop of Anbar. There seem also to have been few monasteries at this period in the exterior provinces. Clearly, there were several monasteries in northern China and Mongolia, as the early life of the Ongut monks Mark and Rabban Sawma demonstrates, and during the last two decades of the thirteenth century several more monasteries were built in central and southern China. There was also a Nestorian monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Samarqand, mentioned both by Marco Polo and in a fourteenth-century text from China. But in the wake of the campaigns of Genghis Khan and his successors, it is doubtful whether more than a handful of Nestorian monasteries were left in Central Asia. When Mark and Rabban Sawma journeyed to Mesopotamia in 1278 they stayed at only one Nestorian monastery on their journey, that of Mar Sehyon near Tus.

Monastic Life in Northern Mesopotamia. In northern Mesopotamia, monastic life continued much as usual in the surviving Nestorian monasteries. The monastery of Beth 'Abe near 'Aqra was evidently flourishing at this period, even though it is rarely mentioned in the literary sources. In 1610, in a report to the Vatican on the condition of the Church of the East, the patriarch Eliya VIII (1591–1617) mentioned that the monastery, which was still occasionally visited for worship,

contained the tombs of thirty-eight holy men and seventy bishops. This revelation hints at an unsuspected age of prosperity for the monastery during the Seljuq and Mongol periods. Since the monastery of Beth ʿAbe had already produced forty-two bishops by the middle of the ninth century, according to Thomas of Marga, it must have continued to supply the Church of the East with bishops well into the thirteenth century, and perhaps beyond, to have notched up such an impressive tally of episcopal corpses.

Similar prosperity may have been enjoyed by some of the other monasteries. Two thirteenth-century Nestorian authors, Yohannan of Mosul and Gabriel Qamsa, were monks respectively of the monasteries of Mar Mikha'il near Mosul and Beth Qoqa near Erbil. Under an energetic bishop, there could even be improvements. According to a seventeenth-century manuscript colophon, the church of the monastery of Mar Awgin was rebuilt in 1271 on the initiative of the metropolitan ʿAbdishoʿ bar Mshak of Nisibis, by the monastery's own monks and by helpers from the nearby village of Maʿarrin and the neighbouring monastery of Mar Yohannan. The same metropolitan also donated twenty-two books to the monastery's library. Meanwhile, a near-contemporary manuscript colophon confirms that Nestorian monastic activity still flourished in some unlikely localities around Nisibis. A manuscript was copied at an unknown date in the thirteenth century in the 'monastery of Mar Hnanya, Mar Hnanishoʿ, Mar Bassima and Mar Habib' on Jabal Judi, more pithily known as the monastery of Mar Bassima or 'the monastery of the Bear'. This monastery, in which the Nestorian writer Joseph Hazzaya had studied in the eighth century, is not mentioned in any of the contemporary literary sources, and its survival into the thirteenth century is of some interest. Other monasteries, equally ignored in the literary sources, may also have survived in the Nisibis and Mosul regions.

It is difficult to judge how far Nestorian monks in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries lived up to the monastic ideals of the Sasanian period. The zeal with which the villagers of Maʿarrin volunteered to restore the monastery of Mar Awgin indicates that monks still enjoyed great respect in the wider Christian community. On the other hand, some monks were clearly unsuited to their vocations. Canons VI and VII of the synod of Timothy II, who succeeded Yahballaha III as patriarch in 1318, warned against a number of abuses in the Nestorian monasteries. As usual, the superiors were enjoined not to allow their monks to be distracted by the presence of women or beardless boys. Women were allowed to enter a monastery 'to receive a blessing from its relics, or to pray, or to seek help or cleansing of body or soul', but if they remained overnight they had to sleep in its martyrion, where an eye could be kept on them. Timothy and his bishops were particularly concerned to prevent monks from leaving their

monasteries except when absolutely necessary. During the reign of Yahballaha III, it seems, some monks had taken advantage of their occasional excursions beyond the walls of their monasteries to ‘wander through the cities and towns’, where they fell in with worldly men who corrupted them from their high calling. Drunkenness, not fornication, seems to have been the main problem, and Canon VI, on the evils of drink, singled out monks for a special scolding. The synod resolved to prevent further illicit visits to the taverns of Mosul and Erbil, and decreed that monks would be harshly disciplined if they did not immediately return to their cells after completing their errands.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

The Thirteenth-Century Nestorian Authors. Among the more notable Nestorian authors of the first half of the thirteenth century was Shlemun of Akhlat, metropolitan of Basra, whose *Book of the Bee* (*ktaba d'deboritha*) is one of the few Nestorian universal histories to survive. Shlemun flourished in the early decades of the thirteenth century and was present at the consecration of the patriarch Sabrisho^c IV in 1222. The *Book of the Bee*, which the author dedicated to his friend Narsai, bishop of Beth Waziq, started at the Creation, romped through the events described in the Old and New Testaments, and concluded with a meditation on the horrors in store for the human race in the Last Days. Shlemun was probably in a position to provide valuable information on the history of the Church of the East, but that was not his theme. Instead, he linked the New Testament to the second coming of Christ with a bald series of lists—of Roman emperors and Persian kings, of the early apostles and the regions they evangelised, and of the succession of the Nestorian patriarchs—which tell the historian nothing of importance and are scarcely enjoyable reading. Curiously, he omitted to list the Muslim caliphs. Much of the material contained in Shlemun's eclectic mixture of historical and theological narrative is legendary, but buried amongst the dross are occasional nuggets of gold. He mentions, for example, that the diocese of Tamanon in the province of Nisibis was named after the ‘eight souls’ (*tmane napshin*) who came out of Noah's Ark. This reference demonstrates that the Nestorian legend that the Ark had grounded on Jabal Judi was already well-developed by Shlemun's time. Unfortunately, Shlemun was incapable of distinguishing truth from legend and used anything to hand as grist for his mill, and so he can take little credit for the rare moments when his text excites a modern reader. This curious antiquarian compilation is readily accessible in English. The *Book of the Bee* was translated and edited by E. A. Wallis Budge in 1886, and this edition has recently been reprinted.

Several other important Nestorian writers flourished in the thirteenth century. Giwargis Warda of Erbil, a slightly younger contemporary of Shlemun of Akhlat who was nicknamed Warda ('the rose') because of the fragrance of his poetry, wrote at least 150 hymns, only a small proportion of which have been edited and translated from Syriac. One hymn, doubtless composed very soon after the event, recounted the Mongol atrocities at Karamlish and Tel Isqof in 1235. Many of these hymns have entered the Syriac liturgy and are still sung today. Giwargis Warda and Khamis bar Qardahe, another influential hymn writer, have bequeathed their names to two of the Nestorian service books, which are still familiarly known as the *Khamis* and the *Warda*. Intriguingly, Khamis composed a number of verses after the fall of Baghdad in which his language alternated between Syriac and Mongol. Perhaps he was obliging the Kerait and Naiman troops who formed part of the Mongol garrisons of Erbil, Urmia and Maragha. These Christian soldiers may well have attended the local Nestorian churches on Sundays, and thanks to Khamis could now join in the singing alongside the locals. Yohannan of Mosul, a monk of the monastery of Mar Mikha'il who flourished around the middle of the century, was the author of the *ktaba d'shappiruth dubarre*, a spiritual directory edited and published by the Chaldean bishop Eliya Mellus in 1868 as a devotional work for schoolchildren. The metropolitan Gabriel Qamsa of Mosul, formerly a monk of the monastery of Beth Qoqa, wrote a long theological poem which concluded with an encomium on the monastery's founder Sabrisho^c. Gabriel flourished during the reign of the patriarch Yahballaha III, and was present at his consecration in 1281.

Bar Hebraeus and 'Abdisho' of Nisibis. No survey of Nestorian literature in the thirteenth century can omit an important Jacobite source for the ecclesiastical history of the Church of the East, the *Chronicle* (*maktbanuth zabne*) of Bar Hebraeus (1226–86). The *Chronicle* is organised into two parts, a secular history (the *Chronicon Syriacum*) and an ecclesiastical history (the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* or *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*). The Syriac text of the *Chronicon Syriacum*, which focuses on events in the Jacobite areas of settlement and only occasionally mentions Nestorian bishops and notables, was published in 1890 by the Lazarist scholar Paul Bedjan (*Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum*), and an English translation was published in 1932 by E A Wallis Budge (*The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*). The *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* is divided into two parts. The first part contains a history of the Jacobite patriarchs of Antioch. The second part is a parallel history of the Jacobite maphrians and the Nestorian catholici, which gives almost as much space to the Nestorian patriarchs as it does to the Jacobite maphrians. Bar Hebraeus was well-informed on the history of the Church of the East. His many literary

productions included a biography in verse of the Nestorian patriarch Denha I and a letter, also in verse, to the same patriarch, demonstrating that the Nestorians were wrong to deny the title 'Mother of God' to Mary. He wrote with a critical eye, and although he drew on Mari and other Nestorian writers for much of his material, he also used other sources, including Michael the Syrian, which gave his work an independent value. Most importantly, he was writing as an outsider, and was often less inclined to accept the historical tradition than his Nestorian counterparts would have been. The *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* has not yet been translated into English, but the 1877 edition of Jean Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy (*Bar Hebraeus Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*) contains a Latin translation alongside the original Syriac text.

Bar Hebraeus, by far the best of the Jacobite writers of the Mongol period, is normally bracketed with 'Abdisho' bar Brikha, the outstanding Nestorian writer of the late thirteenth century. 'Abdisho' was metropolitan of Nisibis from 1291 until his death in 1318 and is often popularly known as 'Abdisho' of Nisibis. He was a prolific (if prolix) author and also a noted scholar, though he was not above forgery from time to time. He shamelessly amended the text of Canon XXI of the synod of Isaac, for example, to list several dioceses in his own metropolitan province of Nisibis which did not exist in 410. He is known to have written a commentary on the Bible, a treatise against heresy and several books of Christian apologetics, including the *Pearl*, *On the Truth of the Faith* and *The Paradise of Eden*. He also made a compilation of the canon law of the Church of the East in two volumes, the *Nomocanon* (or *Book of Synodical Decisions*) and the *Order of Church Regulations*. These two volumes were commended to the bishops of the Nestorian Church by the patriarch Timothy II in 1318, and the *Nomocanon* in particular was widely copied. The Saint Thomas Christians of Trichur possess the earliest known manuscript of the *Nomocanon*, copied in 1291 by the scribe Abu'l Khair, probably a Jacobite priest of the church of Mar Thomas in Mosul. One of 'Abdisho's minor works was a book of arguments, proverbs and riddles, which may have been composed to outdo the *Laughable Stories* of Bar Hebraeus. He was also at home with the Greek classics, and demonstrated his versatility with his *Explanation of the Letter sent by Aristotle to Alexander the Great* and *On the Mysteries of the Greek Philosophers*. He also compiled a long and extremely valuable list of Syriac authors, treasured by modern scholars because it not only helps them to identify what has survived but also to assess how much has been lost. It also demonstrates how poorly-informed even educated Nestorian churchmen were on their own past. 'Abdisho' tried to list his authors in chronological order, but wrongly assigned Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha to the second half of the sixth century, making them predecessors of the patriarch Isho'yahb I (585–95). He was followed

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by Assemani and Wright, and it was only in the twentieth century that these two key authors of the Church of the East were correctly relocated, to the seventh and eighth centuries respectively.

The most important of ‘Abdisho’^c’s surviving literary works is the *Pearl* (*marganitha*), written in 1298. This work, a summary of Christian theology divided into five sections, deals respectively with God, the Creation, the Christian dispensation, the sacraments of the Church, and the signs by which the approach of the Last Days could be recognised. In his discussion of the significance of the Incarnation, ‘Abdisho’ stressed that Jesus had experienced the full range of biological and psychological functions of a normal human being. Here he was restating the classic Antiochene view that Christ’s redemptive mission could only have been effective if he had been fully human. But he also insisted that Jesus was fully God as well as fully Man, using the Theodoran formula of two natures in two hypostases and one person. ‘Abdisho’^c’s *Pearl* is evidence that the Nestorians had maintained their christology unchanged since the end of the fifth century, and that it was perfectly orthodox. The *Pearl* was translated into English by the Anglican missionary George Percy Badger in the middle of the nineteenth century, to support his argument that the modern Nestorian Church did not subscribe to the heretical doctrines imputed to Nestorius.

Here and elsewhere ‘Abdisho’ wrote self-consciously, knowing that the Church of the East was considered heretical by the Western Churches. Incidents such as Rabban Sawma’s interrogation by the Roman cardinals in 1287 and Ricoldo de Monte Croce’s clashes with the Nestorians of Baghdad in 1290 typified the process by which, in the second half of the thirteenth century, increased contact with Western Christendom encouraged Nestorian scholars to reflect upon their heritage. ‘Abdisho’ therefore took pains to explain points of the Nestorian liturgy, such as the veneration of the cross, which might be misunderstood by Europeans. His approach to the label ‘Nestorian’ was a model of commonsense, which might with advantage be copied by his modern descendants. He accepted the name, as it conveniently distinguished the Nestorians from the Jacobites, but he insisted that Nestorius had been innocent of heresy. He argued that the Church of the East had preserved without alteration the doctrine it had learned from the apostles. The Western Churches had allowed this doctrine to become corrupted, and the Church of the East had naturally jumped to the defence of Nestorius when he was persecuted for defending the truth. But that did not mean that the Church of the East had espoused the heresy associated with the name of Nestorius. Nestorius was a Greek, so his views were unlikely to have influenced the Church of the East. The truth of the matter was that Nestorius had followed the Church of the East, not the other way round. Except for the

last sentence, which is demonstrably incorrect, this was a reasonable statement of the relationship between the Nestorian Church, Nestorius and the Nestorian heresy, though the Church of the East would have to wait for five more centuries before European Christians would give its case a fair hearing.

The History of Rabban Sawma and Mark. The last, and by far the most enjoyable, Nestorian literary production of the Mongol period was the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*, a vivid biography of the patriarch Yahballaha III (1281–1317) and his friend Rabban Sawma. The sole surviving manuscript of the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark* was only discovered in the 1880s, and the Syriac text was translated into French by J B Chabot in 1894 and into English (under the title *The Monks of Kublai Khan*) by E A Wallis Budge in 1928. The *History* was commissioned by Yahballaha III some years before his death, and one of its main aims was to preserve the memory of the tragic events at Erbil in 1310. The anonymous author, possibly Yahballaha's successor Timothy II but more probably a humble monk working in the patriarchal cell in Maragha, wrote the bulk of the *History* between 1310 and 1312 and merely topped and tailed it after Yahballaha's death in 1317. He drew on Rabban Sawma's own account of his visit to the Western courts (written, interestingly, neither in Syriac nor in Arabic but in Persian, the official court language of the il-khans), and was also given a large amount of material by the patriarch Yahballaha himself. The *History* is an insider's account of a dramatic period in the history of the Church of the East, and is all the more interesting because of its personal element. Like the twelfth-century *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena, it is an account of stirring events by a well-placed witness. The *History* contains some vivid set-piece descriptions, including accounts of the arduous journey made by the two monks from China to Mesopotamia in 1278, Rabban Sawma's journey to the European courts in 1287–8, the consecration of the monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Maragha in 1301, and above all the massacre at Erbil in 1310. The account of Rabban Sawma's journey to the West has proved particularly popular with modern readers. The Nestorian monk was a contemporary of Marco Polo, and just as Marco Polo's description of thirteenth-century China seen through European eyes has an irresistible fascination, so does Rabban Sawma's description of thirteenth-century Europe seen through Asian eyes. The author would have been disappointed by this emphasis, since Rabban Sawma's embassy was not his main subject. He would have much preferred his readers to applaud the powerful passage towards the end of the *History* where, in language echoing the Lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah, he solemnly called down God's curse upon the Muslims of Erbil:

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The Lord will remember what has happened to his people, and how his inheritance has been plundered. The Lord is good to his servants and to the souls that seek him. He will give you the reward which your deeds have deserved. He will give you sorrow of heart, and his stroke will follow after you. He will destroy you in his anger, and will blot you out from under the heavens, because you have swept away his churches, and have hacked in pieces the sheep of his pasture. Those who pass you on the road will smite their hands together. They will hiss, and wag their heads, and say, 'This is Erbil, the city that God has cursed!'

Chapter Seven
THE YEARS OF DARKNESS
(1318–1552)

OVERVIEW

At the end of the thirteenth century the Church of the East still extended across Asia to China. In the 1320s the biographer of the patriarch Yahballaha III praised the Church's achievement in converting 'the Indians, the Chinese and the Turks', and did not suggest that this achievement might soon be threatened. In 1348, according to the historian 'Amr, the Church of the East had twenty-seven metropolitan provinces stretching from Jerusalem to China. His claim was exaggerated, but not absurdly so. By the middle of the sixteenth century this imposing structure had been almost completely swept away. The Nestorian communities in India were all that survived of the Church of the East's exterior provinces, and in its Mesopotamian heartland, with the exception of a few outlying communities south and west of Mosul, the Nestorians were largely confined to a rough triangle of territory bounded by Mosul, Lake Van and Lake Urmia.

Although the broad outlines of this process are clear, major gaps remain in the historical record. Between 1318 and 1552 the written sources for the history of the Church of the East almost dry up. No narrative histories of the Nestorian Church have survived for this period, and it is not even clear whether any were written. For nearly two and a half centuries the history of the Church is shrouded in almost complete silence. Remarkably, more is known about the small Nestorian community in China in the half century before its expulsion in 1368 than about the activities of the Church of the East in its Mesopotamian heartland during the same period. Most of the little that is known about the Church's history during these 'dark centuries', as they have recently been termed, comes from chance references by outsiders, whether Jacobites, Armenians, Muslims or European travellers. As far as its own spokesmen are concerned, the Church of the East almost drops off the map. So little is known about this period that it is impossible to determine whether monastic life and literary endeavour continued normally or whether there was a profound disruption of normal life. Certainly, if books were written and manuscripts copied as frequently in the fourteenth and fifteenth

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centuries as in the thirteenth century, very few of them have survived. A recent study of the Syriac manuscript tradition identified 42 dated manuscripts from the thirteenth century and 195 from the sixteenth century, compared with only 13 manuscripts from the fourteenth century and 33 from the fifteenth century. No doubt these figures err on the low side, but they are highly suggestive. It is possible that life did indeed continue much as normal, and that many manuscripts copied in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were destroyed at a later date (there was a catastrophic loss of over 1,000 manuscripts from the monastery of Rabban Hormizd in 1850). Alternatively, the disorders of the times may have discouraged writing and copying.

Some traditional histories of the Church of the East have portrayed the 'dark centuries' as a period of apocalyptic decline. In this view of events, the villain of the piece is Timur Leng, whose campaigns in Central Asia, Persia, Iraq, Turkey and India during the last two decades of the fourteenth century were accompanied by atrocious bloodshed. Timur, it has been claimed, wiped out the Nestorian communities in Central Asia and in southern and central Iraq, precipitating a 'flight to the mountains' of Hakkari by the dazed survivors. There is indeed evidence for a migration of Christians to the Hakkari mountains and the Urmia plain at the end of the fourteenth century, but Timur was only one of many warlords who harried the Christians of Kurdistan during the 'dark centuries'. Between 1318 and 1552 the cities of the Tigris plain, the uplands between Mosul and Urmia and the country around Maragha and Tabriz were repeatedly traversed by hostile armies. The warfare that accompanied the fragmentation of the Mongol Empire between the 1330s and the 1370s was followed by Timur's campaigns in the 1380s and 1390s. In the fifteenth century the Nestorian country was devastated more than once during the wars between the Qara Qyunlu and the Aq Qyunlu. During the first half of the sixteenth century the region was again devastated during the wars between the Ottoman Turks and the Persians. Brigandage flourished, and Christian monasteries and churches offered tempting targets for bandits. In the large cities, where the civil government was still able to exercise a degree of authority, Muslim policy towards the Christians was as capricious as ever. Some governors enthusiastically enforced the Muslim laws of restriction against the Christians, confiscating or destroying churches. Some of these churches were ransomed with the usual bribes, but not all. In this climate of lawlessness, all the Christian Churches in Kurdistan suffered alike. The 'dark centuries' are best understood not as a period of dramatic decline for the Nestorian Church, but rather as one of constant, debilitating attrition, punctuated periodically by isolated incidents of violence and destruction.

A number of Jacobite and Armenian narratives written during the 'dark centuries', which document the toll taken by warfare and brigandage on their own Churches, help to redress the lack of Nestorian sources. The continuators of the thirteenth-century *Chronography* and *Ecclesiastical History* of Bar Hebraeus took the history of the Jacobite Church down to the end of the fifteenth century. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Armenian colophons refer repeatedly to the plunder of Christian churches and monasteries during the wars in the 1360s and 1370s between the Jalayirid ruler Shaikh Uvais and his successor Husain, and during the fighting between the Qara Quyunlu and the Aq Quyunlu in the 1440s. They also complained about the imposition of high taxes and the spiteful enforcement of the traditional Muslim laws of restriction against the Christians. Few Armenian scribes ever looked on the bright side of life, and the relentlessly gloomy testimony of their colophons is perhaps overdone at times. But it cannot be discounted altogether. The Jacobite and Armenian narratives broadly agree that, if times were hard for everyone, they were particularly hard for the Christians. Although Christians living in the cities were rarely at risk of their lives, the rural communities often fell pray to bandits or marauding soldiers. In 1369 the Jacobite monastery of Mar Mattai was sacked and plundered by a band of Kurdish brigands acting with the connivance of the governor of Mosul. Since the Jacobites and Nestorians lived alongside one another in the villages of the Mosul plain and in the cities of the Tigris valley, it is difficult not to conclude that life was equally precarious for the Nestorians. Nestorian and Jacobite Christians in the countryside of northern Iraq huddled together for safety, polarising into a small number of large villages.

The remaining Christian communities in southern Mesopotamia disappeared between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Nestorian communities in Central Asia also crumbled in the second half of the fourteenth century, through a combination of plague and conversions to Islam, and the Nestorians were expelled from China by the first Ming emperor. The gains made in seven centuries of missionary endeavour east of the Oxus were wiped out in a few decades. The collapse of the exterior provinces (with the important exception of India) was unfortunate, but hardly a mortal blow to the Church of the East. Judging from the observations of European travellers to China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there were only around 30,000 Nestorian Christians living in China, and they were driven out, not killed. In northern China, small communities may even have survived into the fifteenth century. The loss of the Christian communities in the provinces of Samarqand and Kashgar and Nevaketh, which probably went over to Islam without a struggle once they were deprived of Christian bishops, was a sad loss to the Church of the East, but hardly a fatal blow. These Turkish

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communities had probably never accounted for more than a fifth of the total number of Nestorian Christians at any one time.

In effect, the Nestorian Church during the 'dark centuries' was stripped of its peripheral communities and pushed back into its historic heartland around Mosul and Nisibis. There would be no further missions to the Turks or the Chinese. It seems unlikely that this was felt as a disaster by the Syrian Christians of northern Mesopotamia. Nineteenth-century European missionaries might lament the loss of the Church of the East's exterior provinces, but they doubtless meant little to the fourteenth-century villagers of the Mosul plain. Nothing vital had been lost. Most of the monasteries found in the Mosul and Nisibis regions at the end of the thirteenth century survived into the sixteenth century. Even though little new literature appeared, these monasteries preserved the heritage of previous centuries, and ensured that the classical literature of the Church of the East was transmitted intact.

Nevertheless, when due allowance has been made, the 'dark centuries' were a period of increasing marginalisation for the Nestorian Church. Under the 'Abbasid caliphs the patriarchs of the Church of the East had normally resided in Baghdad, close to the seat of power. Under the Seljuqs, their consecration ceremonies had involved the civil authorities, and the marks of favour that had been conferred upon them by successive caliphs were on most occasions admitted by the Muslims. In particular, when the Christians argued among themselves, the primacy of the Nestorian patriarch over his Jacobite and Melkite counterparts was generally upheld. This pre-eminence, for which successive Nestorian patriarchs had struggled tenaciously, was swept away in the fourteenth century. Denha II (1336/7–1381/2) was probably the last Nestorian patriarch to be consecrated in Baghdad, and for at least part of his reign resided in the village of Karamlish in the Mosul plain. Very little is known about his fifteenth-century successors, but they probably spent most of their reigns in one or other of the secluded Nestorian monasteries around Gazarta or Mosul. After the Ottoman Turks imposed some sort of order on Kurdistan in the first half of the sixteenth century, they recognised the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Churches as *millet*s, protected minorities, and invited their patriarchs to reside in Constantinople. The Nestorian and Jacobite patriarchs were ignored, and their interests at the Sublime Porte were henceforth represented, to the extent that they were considered at all, by the Armenian catholicus. This was a sad comedown for the Church of Timothy I.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Fourteenth-Century Nestorian Patriarchs. The patriarch Yahballaha III, deeply discouraged by the tragedy at Erbil, died in his beloved monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Maragha on 15 November 1317, and his body was buried in the monastery's precincts. He was succeeded as patriarch by the metropolitan Joseph of Erbil, who was consecrated in the traditional manner in the great church of Kokhe in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in February 1318. According to 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, Joseph was chosen because of his knowledge of languages. Presumably he was fluent in Persian, the court language of the il-khans, as well as in Arabic and Syriac. Nestorian bishops at this period often changed their names when they were transferred from one diocese to another, and there are good grounds for identifying Joseph with the metropolitan Isho'sabran of Erbil, who was sent by Yahballaha III to the court of the il-khan Uljaitu in 1310 in an unsuccessful attempt to avert the threatened massacre of the Christians of Erbil. The new patriarch took the auspicious name Timothy, but his reign was ill-omened from the start. Only four metropolitans and seven bishops were present at the consecration, compared with the seven metropolitans and twenty-four bishops present at the consecration of Yahballaha III in 1281.

Immediately after his enthronement Timothy II (1318–c.1332) convened a synod to settle matters of church discipline, attended by the same bishops who had met to elect and enthrone him. The synod focused on the reform of the clergy. Its acts were specifically designed to root out worldly and incompetent clerics from every level of the Church of the East, suggesting that ignorance and corruption among the priesthood was at this period so common as to be scandalous. Canon I required all clergy to be familiar with the convenient two-volume collection of the rules and ceremonies of the Church drawn up by 'Abdisho' of Nisibis, a provision which suggests that illiteracy and ignorance may have been as widespread among the Nestorian clergy of Mesopotamia at this period as, according to Latin missionaries, it was in China. Corruption was an equally serious problem, and venal bishops and priests were threatened with removal from their office. Canon V attempted to deal with this problem by tackling it at its source. It provided for greater care to be taken in the election of bishops and lower-ranking church officers, requiring the conduct of candidates for office to be thoroughly scrutinised beforehand. The synod also considered the institution of the patriarchal visitor. This office seems to have developed in the thirteenth century, and was a means of enabling the patriarch to exert a degree of control over the metropolitans of the far-flung exterior provinces of the Church of the East by sending men of his own choice to a particular

province to work alongside the metropolitan. During the reign of Yahballaha III some of these visitors had abused their powers, and the synod decided to revoke their patents and appoint *periodeuts* instead.

Unlike Yahballaha III, who had spent the last years of his reign in the monastery of Saint John the Baptist at Maragha, Timothy appears to have fixed the patriarchal seat at the monastery of Mar Mikha'il of Tar'il near Erbil. The initial years of his reign were relatively peaceful. The *il-khan* Abu Sa'id (1316–35), although praised in one Muslim source as a destroyer of churches, was a tolerant ruler in the early years of his reign. He was only sixteen on his accession, and until 1327 little more than a puppet in the hands of his commander-in-chief, the emir Choban. Although not a Christian himself, Choban was a humane man who had done what he could to protect the civilian Christian population of Erbil during the tragic disturbances of 1310. Probably on Choban's advice, one of Abu Sa'id's earliest decisions was to allow the Vatican to appoint Latin bishops in a number of Persian cities. In November 1321 Pope John XXII wrote to Choban personally to recommend to his care both the Franciscan missionaries at work in the country and 'all the Christians in the realm of the khan of Persia'.

In 1327 the Christians of the *il-khanate* lost their main protector when Abu Sa'id, alarmed at Choban's growing influence, killed his former adviser. Choban's death removed a moderating influence on Abu Sa'id's counsels, and conditions for Christians in the *il-khanate* significantly deteriorated in the following decade. An Armenian chronicler mentioned that heavy taxes were imposed on the Christians in 1330. Other references from both Muslim and Christian sources suggest that the imposition of taxes may have been followed by an official persecution three years later. Al-Maqrizi mentioned that in 1333 the Christians of Baghdad were forced to wear waist-belts and blue turbans, clothing which traditionally distinguished Christians in Muslim lands, and the continuator of Abu al-Fida stated that in 1333 many Christians, including some nobles, became Muslims. A Jacobite hymn mentioned that the Jacobite church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin was looted in 1333. Against this background, a Nestorian manuscript of 1332, written at Baghdad for 'the glorious chief' Hakim Hormizd, son of Isho^c, son of Khamis, may represent a gift to a moderate Christian governor in the final year of relative security.

It is possible that the confiscation of the Nestorian monastery of Saint John the Baptist at Maragha took place at about this time. At some time before 1345 the monastery was 'conquered and occupied' by the Muslims and the body of the patriarch Yahballaha III was exhumed and reburied in the monastery of Mar Mikha'il of Tar'il near Erbil. Safi al-Din, the ancestor of the Safavid dynasty,

is said to have ordered the destruction of a monastery near Maragha about this time, angered by the ringing of its bells, and he may have been the culprit. However, the orderly transfer of Yahballaha's remains invites comparisons with the official persecution of Nauraz in 1295, and argues a deliberate state act rather than a spontaneous act of anti-Christian spite. The monastery of Mar Mikha'il may have been chosen for the reburial of Yahballaha's remains simply because he had spent almost as much time there as in Maragha, but the monastery was also close to Erbil, the centre of gravity of the Church of the East during the reign of Timothy II. It is tempting to place the appropriation of the monastery of Saint John the Baptist during the final years of Timothy II's reign and to see his hand in the arrangements made for his predecessor's reburial.

Timothy II appears to have died in either 1328 or 1332. His is the final name in a list of Nestorian patriarchs in a contemporary heptasyllabic poem, evidently written shortly after his death, and he is there described as 'Timothy of dear memory, who bore the stigmata of Christ. May the spirit give him rest with the just, and grant us peace together with him'. The reference to 'the stigmata of Christ' does not appear to be formulaic, and it suggests that, like his predecessor Yahballaha III, he may have been tortured for his faith, perhaps during the troubles in Erbil in 1310.

The death of Abu Sa'id in 1335 was followed by a succession struggle among his emirs which brought to an end the stability which had been one of the greatest blessings of Mongol rule. One of the protagonists in this struggle was the Oirat 'Ali Padshah, governor of Baghdad, who killed Abu Sa'id's successor Arpa Ke'un in May 1336 after defeating his army, and was himself defeated and killed by Hasan-i Buzurg, founder of the Jalayirid dynasty, in July of the same year. 'Ali Padshah was remembered by contemporary Christians as a fanatical Muslim, and although his rule lasted only a few months in the summer of 1336, he found time during this period to order repressive measures to be taken against Christians. The continuator of the *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus states merely that some churches were closed or destroyed on his orders, but a contemporary marginal note in a Nestorian manuscript speaks of harsher measures:

He wrote an edict, which he promulgated throughout his dominions, that churches and altars should be torn down, and that everyone who admitted to being a Christian should be beheaded and his house plundered. This news flew to every region and town, and grief and suffering increased for the Christians, along with miserable and bitter affliction, and hope was entirely cut off.

Both sources give the credit for 'Ali Padshah's defeat and death to a Christian emir named Hajji Togai, one of Hasan-i Buzurg's commanders, who restored all the confiscated churches to their former owners.

Timothy II was succeeded by the patriarch Denha II in 1336/7. Denha's consecration, immediately after 'Ali Padshah's defeat, was 'sponsored' by the Christian hero Hajji Togai, and may have taken place in Baghdad, then briefly under the control of Hasan-i Buzurg. During at least part of his reign, however, he resided at the village of Karamlish in the Mosul plain, where he is mentioned on three occasions by the continuator of Bar Hebraeus's *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*. He received the Jacobite patriarch Ignatius Isma'il on a visit to Karamlish in 1358, accepted a bribe from the Jacobite bishop Dioscorus bar Kaina of Damascus in 1360 in exchange for supporting his candidacy for the office of maphrian, and received the maphrian Athanasius Abraham in state at Karamlish shortly after his consecration in October 1364.

One of the few other events of Denha's reign to have left a trace in the historical record was the exhumation, in 1349, of the remains of the seventh-century patriarch Hnanisho' I (686–98) by the Nestorians of Mosul. The patriarch had been buried in the monastery of Jonah, on the east bank of the Tigris opposite Mosul, and when the tomb was opened his body, lying in a coffin of planewood, was found to be in a miraculous state of preservation. The historian 'Amr, who saw the body for himself, said that crowds came to view the dead patriarch, who seemed to be only sleeping. The monastery was confiscated and turned into a place of Muslim pilgrimage shortly afterwards, and when Timur Leng visited it in 1393 it had undergone a remarkable transformation. Hnanisho' was no longer remembered and Timur was shown the tomb of the prophet Jonah himself. The 'tomb of Jonah' still exists, and visitors are still shown a heavy planewood coffin, reverently shrouded with a green cloth, in which the prophet supposedly lies buried. Some historians suspect that for the past six centuries the Muslim faithful have in fact been paying their devotions to the petrified corpse of a Christian patriarch.

The confiscation of the monastery of Jonah by the Muslims is one of the few events that can be approximately dated in a complex process of religious consolidation and polarisation in the Nisibis and Mosul regions during the 'dark centuries'. In the Nisibis region, where the Roman-Persian border had once separated the Jacobite villages and monasteries of the Tur 'Abdin from the Nestorian settlements in Arzun, Qardu, Beth Zabdai and Beth 'Arbaye, several villages known to have been Nestorian at the end of the thirteenth century had Jacobite or Muslim populations two and a half centuries later. The changes may not always have been at the expense of the Nestorians. Intriguingly, one of the

very few surviving Nestorian manuscripts from the fifteenth century was copied in Kfarburan in the Tur ʿAbdin by a scribe named Masʿud in 1429/30, 'in the time of the patriarch Mar Shemʿon and the metropolitan Mar Timothy of Nisibis'. Kfarburan had been a staunchly Jacobite village for several centuries, but on the evidence of this colophon there were at least some Nestorians living there in the fifteenth century, though they are not again attested. Strange things were evidently going on along the border. By and large, though, the Jacobites had the better of this religious shakeout. Most of the surviving Nestorian monasteries on Mount Izla were either taken over by the Jacobites during the 'dark centuries' or abandoned. Only the monastery of Mar Awgin remained in Nestorian hands. By the middle of the sixteenth century the Nestorian archdiocese of Nisibis, which had once played such an important role in the history of the Church of the East, was moribund. The church's future in the Nisibis region lay with the hitherto little-regarded Nestorian communities in the Amid, Mardin, Seert and Gazarta regions.

Most of the small Christian villages in the Mosul plain attested during the Mongol period and earlier also disappeared. Although few details are known of the process by which this occurred, a number of Nestorian villages in the hills around Alqosh were taken over by the Yezidis, and several more further to the south were lost to the Muslims. The Yezidis, originally an unorthodox Muslim sect established towards the end of the eleventh century by Shaikh ʿAdi bin Musafir, developed by the sixteenth century into a separate religious community. The movement gained a large following during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The village of Lalish in the mountains to the northeast of Alqosh, in which the tomb of Shaikh ʿAdi was preserved, became an important Yezidi centre, and a group of Yezidi settlements was established at ʿAin Sifni and half a dozen nearby villages near Alqosh known to have been Christian in the Mongol period. They were probably taken over by the Yezidis in the fourteenth century. Several Christian villages further south were also abandoned in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, perhaps during the unsettled period which followed the death of Abu Saʿid in 1335. The Nestorian villages of Beth Bore, Beth Gurbaq and Beth Zabaye, which were Christian in the thirteenth century (Beth Gurbaq had a church dedicated to the seventh-century monk Rabban Bar ʿIdta and also possessed one of his fingers as a relic), were inhabited entirely by Muslims in the sixteenth century. The Jacobites also had their losses.

It is not clear whether the Christians abandoned the smaller villages voluntarily or under threat of violence, but events such as the sack of the Jacobite monastery of Mar Mattai in 1369 by Kurdish bandits must have been intimidating. Either way, the result was striking. The Christians of the Mosul plain consolidated into

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a small number of entirely-Christian villages, some of which had very substantial populations. By the middle of the sixteenth century the Nestorians were established in Telkepe, Tel Isqof and one or two other large villages along the road from Mosul to Alqosh, while the Jacobites were similarly concentrated in the villages of Bartallah, Ba'shiqa, Bahzani and Qaraqosh in the eastern Mosul plain, surrounding the outlying Nestorian village of Karamlish. Some villages changed their allegiance during this process of consolidation. Piyoz, a Jacobite village a few miles to the east of Alqosh, emerged from the 'dark centuries' as a Nestorian stronghold. Perhaps the Jacobites sold their property to a group of Nestorian immigrants and moved to Qaraqosh or one of the other large Jacobite centres. The distinctive religious geography of the Mosul plain, which was to remain reasonably stable between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, crystallised during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The motive for this polarisation, foreshadowed in the thirteenth century by Jacobite migration to the village of Beth Sayyade near Erbil, was surely security. The Christians were seeking safety in numbers.

At the same time, the Christian population of the Mosul region grew significantly as a result of immigration from other regions. The residence of the patriarch Denha II in Karamlish brought several decades of prosperity to this large Nestorian village. During the middle decades of the fourteenth century Karamlish also had small Jacobite and Armenian communities, who lived alongside the majority Nestorian population, and the village chiefs exaggerated their consequence by styling themselves 'emirs'. Denha's residence also encouraged Nestorian Christians living in other parts of Iraq to migrate to the Mosul plain, where they could be close to the patriarch and the relative security his presence offered. Some of the migrants came from Erbil and nearby villages such as Beth Sayyade, doubtless with the memory of the massacre of 1310 still fresh in their minds. So many Christians left unlucky Erbil at this period that by the sixteenth century the only village left in the region with a substantial Nestorian population was 'Ainqawa. Most of the incomers settled in Karamlish and in the nearby villages of Alqosh, Telkepe, Tel Isqof and Batnaya. In 1913 these five villages had a combined population of 25,000 individuals and accounted for a quarter of the total membership of the Chaldean Church. To judge by the large number of Nestorian priests recorded in Telkepe and Alqosh in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their prominence was several centuries old and was the result of immigration in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The largest of these villages, Telkepe, is first mentioned in 1403, and was almost certainly founded during the reign of Denha II.

According to a contemporary manuscript colophon, Denha II died in 1381/2. If this statement can be trusted, he reigned for forty-five years, a long but by

no means impossible period. In the 1920s the Nestorian priest Joseph Qellaita published a list of Nestorian patriarchs that included the patriarch 'Denha III (1359–68)', apparently under the assumption that the patriarch Denha mentioned at Karamlish in the 1360s by the continuator of the *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus was the successor of Denha II. There are no grounds for such an assumption, and it is now generally accepted that 'Denha III' never existed. However, the patriarchal succession for the half century following the death of Denha II in 1381/2 remains problematical. Some recent lists of the patriarchs of the Church of the East posit two patriarchs named Shem'on between Denha II and the patriarch Eliya IV, whose death has conventionally been placed in 1437. This reconstruction conflicts with a fifteenth-century note adding the names Timothy, Denha, Shem'on, Eliya and 'Shem'on of our days', to a list of patriarchs ending with Yahballaha III in a copy of Shlemun of Akhlāt's *Book of the Bee*. Very few manuscripts have survived from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and none have colophons that shed further light on the patriarchal succession at this period, but there is no reason to reject the statement of this rare contemporary source that only a single patriarch named Shem'on reigned between Denha II's death and the accession of Eliya IV. No primate of the Church of the East had been called Shem'on for almost a millennium, and this elusive successor of Denha II presumably wished to honour the memory of Shem'on bar Sabba'e, the fourth-century martyred bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Perhaps he knew that the Church of the East faced a time of trial at the hands of Timur Leng as severe as that of the 'forty-year persecution' of Shapur II. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the name Shem'on soon became traditional, and was taken by twenty Nestorian patriarchs between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. It is not known where Shem'on II and Eliya IV were consecrated. A traditional investiture in Baghdad is not entirely out of the question, as the Jacobite maphrian Athanasius Abraham was able to make a ceremonial visit to Baghdad as late as 1369; but in view of the disorders of the 1380s it seems more likely that they were consecrated in northern Iraq, probably in one of the surviving Nestorian monasteries.

Timur Leng and the 'Flight to the Mountains'. Between 1380 and 1405 much of Asia was convulsed by the campaigns of Timur Leng. The destruction and slaughter of his campaigns was notorious, and it is likely that in many parts of Central Asia the weakened remnant of Church of the East was finally extinguished by the material and human losses it suffered at Timur's hands. However, although many Armenian and Georgian Christians were killed in Timur's campaigns further west, the Nestorian Church in Kurdistan seems to have escaped comparatively lightly. Timur was responsible for massacres of Georgian Christians at Tiflis, Jacobite

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Christians at Tagrit and in the Tur ʿAbdin, and Armenian Christians in Van. During Timur's campaigns, and in the struggles for power in the decades which followed, there were also a number of massacres of Jacobite Christians at Amid, Mardin and Hesna d'Kifa, recorded in detail by the Jacobite chroniclers, and it is possible that the small Nestorian communities of these cities also suffered on some of these occasions. But Mosul, Erbil and Gazarta, cities with significant Nestorian communities, surrendered peacefully to Timur and were not harmed. Salmas was bypassed by his troops, and Tabriz and Nakhichevan were peacefully occupied. The Nestorian settlements to the north of Mosul, and Shigar to the west, were never traversed by Timur's forces. In 1401 Pope Boniface IX granted an indulgence to Greek Orthodox and Nestorian Christians who sheltered Latin Christians in flight from Timur, implying that such shelter could be found.

Nevertheless, nowhere was completely safe from the disruption of Timur's campaigns. In 1398 an Armenian scribe writing in the Albaq district of Hakkari, where Nestorian and Armenian Christians lived alongside each other, mentioned that soldiers—perhaps a scouting force from Timur's army—occupied the small town of Diza Gawar and plundered the Gawar district and the upper valley of the Great Zab as far as Julamerk. Besides destroying houses and crops, they also arrested the Muslim emir of Hakkari, ʿIzz al-Din Shir, who seems to have protested at their depredations, and imprisoned him on the island of Akhtamar in Lake Van. The emir had evidently won the affection of his Christian vassals, as the Armenian scribe praised him for 'protecting the Christians more energetically than his predecessors'.

Although the soldiers are not said to have killed any of the Christians of Gawar, such raids were ruinous. But they paled into insignificance compared with the horrors that awaited many of the towns on Timur's line of march. The main impact of Timur's campaigns for the Nestorians of Mesopotamia was felt in Beth Garmai, Beth ʿArbaye and Beth Aramaye. The town of Tagrit in the Tirhan district was sacked by Timur, ending its importance as a Jacobite stronghold, and the Nestorian communities of Tirhan may well have been treated in a similar fashion. The virtual extinction of Christianity in Beth Garmai probably also dates from Timur's time. In 1401 Baghdad was taken by storm and, it is said, 90,000 of its citizens were massacred. Unlike Hulegu in 1258, Timur did not spare the city's Christians. On this occasion, Muslims, Christians and Jews were massacred indiscriminately. Baghdad was soon repopulated, however, and an Armenian historian mentioned Nestorians among the city's Christian groups in the early years of the fifteenth century.

In the nineteenth century it was widely believed that the Nestorian presence in the Hakkari region dated from the closing years of the fourteenth century,

when the upper valley of the Great Zab was settled by Nestorian Christians in flight from Timur's soldiers. The truth is somewhat more complex. It is now known that the Nestorian settlement of the Hakkari region was far earlier than the fourteenth century. There were Nestorian villages in the Gawar district before the Arab conquest, and in 1171 forty Nestorian villages in 'the mountain' to the northeast of the monastery of Mar Mattai, almost certainly in the Berwari and Tiyari districts, were attacked and pillaged by the Kurds. Nestorian monastic activity in the Hakkari region is also attested in the thirteenth century. The church of Mar 'Aziza in the Jilu village of Zirine, often referred to as a monastery, is first mentioned in 1213, and one of the rare surviving manuscripts from this period, a copy of the works of Isaac of Nineveh, was written by a Nestorian monk in a village in Walto in 1229 and acquired by some other monks in the Tiyari district in 1235. The manuscript was completed a few years later in an unnamed monastery 'in the Dasen region', perhaps in the Jilu district. Nevertheless, it seems likely that many of the 250 or so Nestorian villages that existed in the Hakkari region in the nineteenth century were indeed founded during a 'flight to the mountains' in the 1390s. Like the Nestorians who settled in the Urmia region during the middle decades of the thirteenth century, the Nestorians who took refuge in Hakkari in the 1390s settled alongside existing Nestorian communities established several centuries earlier. The remote Hakkari mountains were less accessible than the Urmia plain, and the raid of 1398 must have come as a rude surprise for Christians who thought they had at last found shelter. Some Nestorians may also have settled further to the west, swelling the Nestorian communities dotted along the upland river valleys to the north of 'Amadiya and Zakho and in the Atel or Bohtan district, between Seert and Gazarta. A diocese was established in the early years of the fifteenth century for Atel and Bohtan, and by the middle of the sixteenth century there was also a diocese for Berwari, whose bishops resided in the village of Dure, just below the cave monastery of Mar Qayyoma. Both dioceses seem to have been created to serve a growing population of Nestorian Christians.

There seems also to have been a large migration of Nestorian Christians into the Urmia region towards the end of the fourteenth century. Very little is known about the fortunes of the existing Nestorian settlements in the Urmia region for most of that century. According to an inscription in the Nestorian church of Mar Giwargis in the Salmas village of Chara, seen by the French scholar Rubens Duval in the early 1880s, the church was restored in 1360 by a certain Mar Sliba, probably bishop of Salmas. This unremarkable inscription is the only fourteenth-century Nestorian inscription that has survived from the Urmia region, and the only Nestorian source that throws any light at all on conditions there. The Armenian colophons provide no help, even though Salmas was an important

centre of Armenian Christianity. However, the tradition of a migration to the Urmia region in the 1390s by Nestorian fugitives in flight from Timur is deeply ingrained in the folk memory of the modern Assyrians, and probably deserves respect. The migration may have put an end to the longstanding Jacobite presence in the region. A Jacobite bishop of Urmia is attested as early as 1189, and during the second half of the thirteenth century both Jacobites and Nestorians flocked to Adarbaigan, where they could live under Mongol protection. Like the Nestorians, the Jacobites had bishops at Tabriz and Urmia (though not Salmas), and a monastery in Maragha, which contained the body of the celebrated thirteenth-century maphrian Bar Hebraeus. By the sixteenth century no trace was left of this once-flourishing Jacobite presence. In the Salmas district, where the Nestorian settlements marched with those of the Armenian Church, the Nestorians lived alongside a significant Armenian minority; but they now had the fertile Urmia plain almost to themselves (except, of course, for their unwelcome Muslim neighbours). The Jacobite chroniclers do not say when or why the Jacobites left Tabriz and Urmia, though a Jacobite community is attested in Tabriz as late as the 1360s. It is an attractive guess that they decamped in disgust once these areas were overrun by the Nestorians in the 1390s.

Although the settlement patterns created at the end of the fourteenth century persisted without radical change into the nineteenth century, when they were mapped in detail by the European and American missionaries, it would be wrong to suppose that they remained entirely static for more than four centuries. Manuscript colophons from the 'dark centuries' and the Ottoman period list several Nestorian villages in northern Mesopotamia that were either abandoned or changed hands between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. The village of Ma'arrin near Nisibis still had a Nestorian community in 1555, but by 1776 (when it was visited by Carsten Niebuhr) it was in the hands of the Jacobites. Between 1470 and 1490 three manuscripts were copied for the Nestorian village of Beth Salam in the Baz district on the initiative of its energetic priest Yohannan, son of the priest Yonan. Beth Salam is not among the five Nestorian villages in the Baz district listed by the Anglican missionary George Percy Badger in 1850, and is not marked on any map. There are no further references to Beth Salam after 1490, and its ultimate fate remains a mystery. A similar uncertainty surrounds the destinies of the villages of Dairek, 'Amrin and Rabahi near Gazarta, last attested in the sixteenth century, and the long-established Nestorian settlements of Beth Ushnaya and Kfar Zamre in Beth 'Arbaye, which were still flourishing in the thirteenth century but are not again mentioned.

After the death of Timur Leng in 1405 eastern Persia enjoyed a period of stability under his son Shah Rukh. For the Nestorians and the other inhabitants

of Mesopotamia and Azerbaijan, however, the first half of the fifteenth century was a period of prolonged misery as the rule of the Timurids gave way to that of two bellicose Turkoman confederations, the Qara Qyunlu ('black sheep'), and the Aq Qyunlu ('white sheep'). The two groups frequently went to war with one another, and there are several indications that the Nestorians suffered from the rapine and pillage inseparable from military campaigns at this period. In 1424 the 'emir of Ispahan' launched a raid against Mosul and Erbil. The bare fact is reported in a Jacobite chronicle, and it is not known how the Christian populations of these cities were affected by this event. Possibly connected with this raid is a note of 1426/7 in a thirteenth-century New Testament copied in the Nestorian monastery of Mar Mikha'il near Mosul, recording its recent rescue from 'the Mongols' by a Nestorian monk of the monastery of Mar Sargis. In 1448, according to a fascinating sixteenth-century note in a Nestorian manuscript from the Urmia region, the Baz and Jilu districts in Hakkari were devastated by the Qara Qyunlu, and their Christian inhabitants were deported to Persia. The deportees never saw their old homes again, but in 1548, nearly a century later, some of their grandchildren returned to the Hakkari mountains and resettled their deserted lands, clearing away the vegetation that had grown up around the abandoned church of Mar 'Aziza in the Jilu village of Zirine. The Jilu Nestorians may well have been resettled in the Salmas district, just over the Persian border. If so, this would explain the inclusion of Jilu in the title of the Nestorian bishops of Salmas in the sixteenth century.

Elsewhere in Mesopotamia, however, life could be better for the Christians, at least if they were lucky. In 1449 an Armenian scribe writing in Amid, a cosmopolitan town with a mixed population of Muslims, Christians and Jews, praised the town's Armenian bishop, who had recently won the friendship of the Muslim governor. Amid's Armenian, Jacobite, Melkite and Nestorian Christians had all benefited from this personal relationship, and the scribe wrote at length in celebration of this rare stroke of good fortune. To impress his Christian friend, the Muslim governor had lowered the taxes on Christians, allowed them to rebuild their ruined churches, and rescinded a spiteful law that had forced Jews and Christians to bury their dead surreptitiously at night, without a proper funeral procession. Priests had long been afraid to wear the robes of their calling in public, but were now once again walking through the streets 'in palpable pomp'. Inevitably, there was a backlash. Amid's Muslims did not like to see the local Christians getting ideas above their station, and forcibly prevented the Armenians from building a new cathedral in the city. Interestingly, the Muslim authorities intervened in favour of the Christians, and the Armenians were eventually able to complete their cathedral.

According to tradition, the Nestorian patriarch Eliya IV was succeeded by Shemʿon IV Basidi, who died in 1497 (his epitaph has been preserved in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh). Eliya's death has traditionally been placed in 1437, because a patriarch named Shemʿon is mentioned in the dating formula of a manuscript colophon of that year, and in some reconstructions Shemʿon IV has been assigned the exceptionally long reign of 60 years (1437–97). Such a protracted reign seems unlikely, and it is now known that Eliya IV died several years before 1437, as a patriarch named Shemʿon is mentioned in the colophon of the manuscript copied by the scribe Masʿud in Kfarburan in 1429/30. A reign of at least 67 years for Shemʿon IV is most improbable, and it is likely that he was preceded by another patriarch named Shemʿon, who reigned for an unknown period either side of the 1430s, was the 'Shemʿon of our days' mentioned in the note in the fifteenth-century manuscript of Shlemun of Akhlāt's *Book of the Bee*, and may for convenience be styled 'Shemʿon III'. Nothing whatsoever is known about the reign of this putative Shemʿon III, and not a great deal more about the reign of his successor Shemʿon IV Basidi, who may have become patriarch around 1450. To judge from his Arabic surname, Shemʿon IV came from a family which hailed from the Erbil village of Beth Sayyade. It is possible that Beth Sayyade still had a Christian community in the fifteenth century, as the metropolitan province of Erbil was still in existence at this period; but it is also possible, and perhaps more likely, that Shemʿon's parents had migrated to the Mosul plain during the reign of Denha II.

Shemʿon IV Basidi and the Hereditary Patriarchate. Shemʿon IV Basidi became notorious in the eyes of future generations for attempting to reserve the patriarchal office for members of his own family. As only metropolitan bishops enjoyed the right of consecrating a new patriarch, he effectively achieved this aim by consecrating bishops solely from among the members of his own family. One of these metropolitans, usually but not invariably a nephew of the patriarch, would eventually be styled *natar kursya*, 'guardian of the throne', hitherto an administrative office held during the brief interregnum between the death of a patriarch and the election of his successor, but now a title designating its holder as the patriarch's chosen successor. There had been isolated attempts in the fourteenth century to introduce hereditary succession in the Jacobite Church, and the custom, according to the continuator of Bar Hebraeus, was common among both the Muslims and the Armenians. There were also convenient precedents in the Church of the East itself. As recently as the thirteenth century, and as far back as the fourth century, there had been occasions where a patriarch was succeeded by his nephew. These, however, had been isolated cases, and the custom had never been institutionalised.

Shemʿon's decision to confine the episcopate to members of the patriarchal family went far beyond previous practice, and eventually had deplorable consequences. By the middle of the sixteenth century there were not enough suitable family members available to fill the available places, with the result that some dioceses were left vacant, while others were occupied by minors. If the testimony of the opponents of the patriarchal family in 1552 can be trusted, this abuse of the patriarch's powers began in the 1450s, probably not long after Shemʿon's accession:

A hundred years ago we had a patriarch who would only consecrate a metropolitan from among his own stock, clan and family, and his family has maintained that custom during the past century. Now only one bishop is left from the family, and he has impudently tried to do the same as his predecessors.

Little is known about the history of the Church of the East in the second half of the fifteenth century. Most of the few surviving colophons from this period supply only the names of a few bishops and scribes. Two incidents recorded by the continuator of the *Chronography* of Bar Hebraeus, however, shed some light on an otherwise dark period. In 1473 the Jacobites of the Tur ʿAbdin village of Beth Sbirina discovered in the vault of one of their churches a marble coffin containing the remains of Mar Dada, a solitary monk who had died centuries earlier. A Jacobite monk from the ʿAqra district infiltrated the Nestorian monastery of Mar Dada near Tabriz in the guise of a Nestorian anchorite, persuaded the gullible abbot in an unexceptionable Nestorian accent to tell him all he knew about Mar Dada, and returned in triumph to the Tur ʿAbdin with a copy of a manuscript recording the saint's life and works. The second incident occurred at Nisibis in the 1480s, during the reign of Ignatius Saba II, the Jacobite patriarch of the Tur ʿAbdin. Ignatius was prevented from rebuilding the old Jacobite churches of Mar Yaʿqob and Mar Domitius in Nisibis by the town's Nestorian community. Despite their obvious interest in preserving a common front in the face of Muslim pressure, there was evidently still little love lost between the two Churches.

Two Nestorian manuscript notes from the 1480s also provide a rare glimpse of the Church of the East in the last decades of the fifteenth century. At this period most of its territory was under the control of the Aq Quyunlu ruler Yaʿqub Beg (1478–92), the son of the celebrated sultan Uzun Hasan (1452–78). Uzun Hasan had extended the power of the Aq Quyunlu from his capital at Tabriz as far as Baghdad, the Persian Gulf and Herat, and had so impressed the Christian powers that the Venetians had sought to enlist him as an ally against the Ottomans. His son Yaʿqub endeared himself to the Nestorians by ending a wave of attacks

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on Christian property that probably began in the final years of his father's reign. According to a note in a manuscript written at Mosul in 1484 by the archdeacon Isho^c, 'a disciple of the patriarchal cell':

The Church was at peace, the convents and the brothers enjoyed freedom, the ruined monasteries were restored, the degrees of priests and levites multiplied, and the faithful were blessed by the intercession of Ya^cqub, king of Media, Persia, Armenia, Babel, the Euphrates and the Tigris, who rules widely and is crowned with victory and empire.

The second manuscript note, written in 1488, mentions that the Nestorian patriarch Mar Shem^on (presumably Shem^on IV Basidi) approached the civil authorities in the wake of an undated Muslim assault on the Christians, and persuaded them to relent. Churches had been destroyed or closed throughout the eastern districts, the colophon claimed, but Shem^on strove with the Muslim authorities 'like a strong wrestler', and won 'a marvellous victory'. As a result, the Muslims reversed their policy and allowed the churches to be reopened. They may also, although the note of 1488 does not explicitly say so, have allowed the Christians to restore buildings that had been plundered or destroyed during the persecution. Both notes probably refer to a single sequence of events: a decision by a local Muslim governor, some time before 1484, to enforce the laws of restriction against the Christians in all their rigour; a petition from the Nestorian patriarch, perhaps to Ya^cqub Beg himself; and an 'intercession' by Ya^cqub Beg which brought the persecution to an end. Taken together, the language of these manuscript notes suggests that the Aq Quyunlu ruler intervened personally to overrule one of his subordinates.

In the early years of the sixteenth century the Church of the East twice consecrated bishops for the Saint Thomas Christians of India. Two Malabar Christians sailed to Mesopotamia, probably in 1499, to beg the Nestorian patriarch to consecrate a bishop for their Church. They met the patriarch Shem^on V (1497–1502) in Gazarta, and he consecrated two bishops, Thomas and Yohannan, from among the monks of the monastery of Mar Awgin near Nisibis. Because these men were going to remote India and were unlikely to challenge the patriarch's authority in Mesopotamia, it presumably did not matter that they were not members of the patriarchal family. Thomas and Yohannan were then sent to India, carrying letters to authenticate their status. Yohannan remained there, while Thomas returned a little later to Mesopotamia, bringing gifts from the Indian Christians to the patriarch.

A further initiative was taken towards the Indian Church in 1503. Probably in response to an appeal conveyed to him by the bishop Thomas, the patriarch Eliya V (1503–4) consecrated a metropolitan and two more bishops for India. The metropolitan Yahballaha and his two suffragans Denha and Ya'qob were also monks of the monastery of Mar Awgin, and were consecrated in the monastery of Mar Yohannan the Egyptian near Gazarta in April 1503. Eliya asked Thomas to accompany them to India, and instructed the four men to go to 'the lands of the Indians, and to the Islands of the Seas between Dabag, Sin and Masin'. The curious reference to the 'Islands of the Seas' was an antiquarian reminiscence of the Nestorian metropolitan province for the East Indies, which had ceased to exist at least two centuries earlier, and by now the Nestorian metropolitans of India also included China in their title. The four bishops arrived in India shortly afterwards, and in 1504 wrote a long and detailed letter to Eliya V, which described the condition of the Nestorian Church in India and gave a fascinating account of the recent arrival of the Portuguese. Eliya died shortly before this letter reached Mesopotamia, and it was read by his successor Shem'on VI (1504–38).

A close reading of the account of the Indian mission to Mesopotamia suggests that Shem'on IV Basidi's determination to restrict the patriarchal succession to members of his family was already beginning to cause resentment. Shem'on IV died in February 1497, and his body was buried in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, where nearly all of his successors for the next three centuries were also buried. But the body of his immediate successor Shem'on V (1497–1502), who died in September 1502 after a reign of only five years, was buried in the monastery of Mar Awgin. The monastery of Mar Awgin was evidently thriving at this period, but it had never been a patriarchal monastery and it is not clear why it was chosen for a patriarchal burial. Perhaps the monks of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, who half a century later would lead the revolt against hereditary succession, refused to recognise Shem'on V as a legitimate patriarch. Another indication of discontent at this period is that the next patriarch, Eliya V (1502–3), was elected in the old style, by an assembly of 'fathers' summoned by the metropolitan Yohannan of Atel. He may well have been an outsider rather than a member of the patriarchal family. Eliya's reign was even shorter than that of his predecessor, and on his death in 1504 his body was buried in the church of Mart Meskinta in Mosul. His successor Shem'on VI (1504–38), on the other hand, was certainly a member of the patriarchal family, and was duly buried in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd after his own death. It is possible that the patriarchal family briefly lost control of the Church of the East in the early years of the sixteenth century, but reasserted its authority in 1504. Eliya V reigned for only two years, a suspiciously short period, and perhaps did not die of natural causes.

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His body may have been denied burial in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd on the orders of his successor Shemʿon VI because (from the point of view of the patriarchal family) he had been chosen illegitimately. This hypothesis is not susceptible of proof, but it is an attractive interpretation of the few known facts. Certainly, it would not be surprising if the discontent that came to a head half a century later was already making itself felt.

The Violent Sixteenth Century. The peace enjoyed under the rule of the Aq Quyunlu did not last. The early years of the sixteenth century saw the expansion eastwards of the territories of the Ottoman Empire, and the establishment of the great Safavid dynasty of Persia. Rivalry between the Ottoman and Persian Empires during much of the sixteenth century resulted in frequent wars between the two states, and the Nestorian territories in Kurdistan and Mesopotamia changed hands more than once. The Safavid dynasty was founded by Ismaʿil I, who defeated the Aq Quyunlu rulers of northern Iran in 1501 and proclaimed himself shah at Tabriz in the same year. In 1501 his power was confined to Azerbaijan, but in the next nine years he conquered the rest of Iran and Mesopotamia, bringing the western frontier of the Safavid state to the Euphrates. The conquest of Kurdistan was carried out by the Qizilbash ('redheads'), a ferocious Central Asian Turkish tribe commanded by Ismaʿil's brother-in-law Muhammad Khan Ustajlu, who was appointed governor of Armenia by Ismaʿil. After capturing Amid he had the city's old noble families slaughtered, and let the Qizilbash loose on the villages of Kurdistan. They pillaged the country as far as Gazarta, stealing flocks, killing the inhabitants, and burning Christian churches.

Detailed accounts have survived in long contemporary colophons of atrocities committed by the Qizilbash at Alqosh in 1508, at Atel in 1512, and at Gazarta in 1510 and 1515. In 1508, angered by their failure to capture Mosul, the Qizilbash laid waste several villages in the Tigris plain between Mosul and Gazarta, and then descended on Alqosh. The villagers fled to the nearby monastery of Rabban Hormizd, hoping that the plunderers would think twice before assaulting this mountain fortress, but the Qizilbash surrounded the monastery and began to soften up the defenders with a barrage of stones and arrows. The villagers surrendered at discretion, and their lives were spared. On this occasion, the Qizilbash contented themselves with raping the women, plundering the monastery and carrying off the villagers' livestock. Later, they became more ruthless. In 1510 they looted and burned Gazarta and pillaged the surrounding villages, destroying churches and monasteries, killing priests, and carrying off boys and girls as slaves. In 1512 they killed forty Christians in the town of Atel, including several priests and deacons and the town's Nestorian bishop Yohannan. In 1515 they again

pillaged Gazarta. Muslim and Christian notables were roughed up, many of the town's menfolk were killed, and women and girls were raped. Churches were defiled and plundered, and books destroyed. The town was burned once again. The men who survived the massacre, whether Muslims, Christians or Jews, were dragged away into captivity. Those who did not die on the march were sold as slaves 'in the islands and remote countries'.

The Safavids were defeated at Chaldiran in 1514, and the Turks reconquered northern Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt. Campaigns in the second half of the century extended the Ottoman frontiers to the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, though not all the territory won would be held permanently. While the Ottoman advance put an end to the oppression of the Qizilbash, the continuing struggle between Turkey and Persia must have caused great hardship to the Nestorians of Kurdistan. The campaign of 1514, fought mainly in Kurdistan, was followed by campaigns in 1534, 1548 and 1553. The Turkish invasion of Persia in 1578 was followed by twelve years of fighting before the peace of 1590. The struggle swayed backwards and forwards across Kurdistan, and as the Persian response to Turkish invasions was normally to adopt a scorched-earth policy, Nestorian villages may have been repeatedly devastated during these campaigns.

In the eyes of the Ottoman sultans the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches, isolated on the eastern fringes of their empire, were of small account compared with the far more numerous Greek Orthodox and Armenian minorities. The Ottomans granted the Armenian and Greek Orthodox Churches *millet* status, and required their patriarchs to live in Istanbul, where they were held directly responsible for the behaviour of their followers. Thereafter the Greek Orthodox patriarch spoke for all the Chalcedonian communities, while his Armenian counterpart represented the Armenian, Jacobite and Nestorian Churches. In the 'Abbasid period the Nestorian patriarch had spoken for all Christians who lived within the territories of the caliphate. Nothing speaks louder for the increasing marginalisation of the Church of the East in the sixteenth century than its humiliating institutional relationship with the Ottoman authorities.

The Schism of 1552. Shem'on VI died on 5 August 1538, and was buried in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. His brother the metropolitan Isho'yahb Bar Mama, who had been the patriarch's *natar kursya* throughout his reign, succeeded him as catholicus early in 1539 after a short interregnum. In the first year of his reign Shem'on VII Isho'yahb consecrated his twelve-year-old nephew Hnanisho' metropolitan of Mosul and *natar kursya*, an act which caused great offence and 'invited the excommunication of his bishops'. Hnanisho' was transferred to the diocese of Gazarta in 1543 after the death of its metropolitan Gabriel,

and in the same year his fifteen-year-old brother Eliya, the future patriarch Eliya VII (1558–91), was consecrated a metropolitan by the patriarch. By 1550 Eliya had replaced Hnanisho^c as *natar kursya*, probably because the latter had died several years earlier (he is last mentioned in 1545). Besides making these two provocative appointments, Shem^con was also accused by his opponents of permitting concubinage, selling clerical posts and living intemperately. Although his dissolute conduct was perhaps exaggerated, there was probably a degree of truth in these charges.

By 1552 Shem^con VII Isho^cyahb had become so unpopular that his opponents rebelled against his authority. The prime movers in the rebellion were the bishops of Erbil, Salmas and Adarbaigan, and they were supported by priests and monks from Baghdad and Kirkuk, from the villages around Gazarta and Nisibis, and from Mardin, Amid and Hesna d'Kifa, the sophisticated urban centres of the Tigris plain. The rebels met at Mosul with priests, monks and lay delegates from these towns and elected as patriarch a monk named Sulaqa, the superior of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh. Unfortunately, no bishop of metropolitan rank was available to consecrate him, as canonically required. This dilemma offered a wonderful opening for the Church of Rome. Sulaqa's supporters decided to legitimise their position by seeking their candidate's consecration by Pope Julius III (1550–5). The Nestorians had long recognised the primacy of the See of Peter, and in their eyes there was nothing untoward in making use of the Vatican's good offices in such an emergency. Concerned merely with the local struggle against Shem^con VII Isho^cyahb, the rebels probably did not appreciate the full significance of the step they were taking. For the Vatican, Sulaqa's rebellion offered the chance to place a Catholic patriarch at the head of the Church of the East and strike a decisive blow at the Nestorian heresy.

Sulaqa went to Rome to put his case in person. He first went to Jerusalem, accompanied by a crowd of supporters, where he made contact with a number of Franciscan missionaries. On their advice, he took ship for Venice with three companions. From Venice he travelled overland through northern Italy, arriving in Rome in November 1552. During his stay he was lodged in the hospice of Santo Spirito in Sassia au Borgo, not far from the church of Saint Peter. He had with him a number of documents attesting to his orthodoxy, and these were vetted by Cardinal Maffei. He also made a satisfactory Catholic profession of faith and presented a letter, drafted by his supporters back in Mosul, which set out his claims to be recognised as patriarch. This letter, which has survived in the Vatican archives, twisted the truth outrageously. The rebels claimed that the iniquitous patriarch 'Shem^con Bar Mama' had died in 1551, and that Sulaqa had been legitimately elected after his death. They also boasted that the city of Mosul

had eighteen Christian churches, all but three of which were Nestorian. In fact the Nestorians only had six churches in Mosul at this period, and the Jacobites had at least as many themselves.

Unable to check the truth of the information supplied by the Nestorian rebels, the Roman cardinals allowed themselves to be persuaded by Sulaqa's lies. At length, satisfied that the Nestorian monk was a good Catholic and that his status as patriarch deserved to be recognised, Julius III promulgated a bull on 20 February 1553, proclaiming Sulaqa 'patriarch of Mosul'. On 9 April Sulaqa was consecrated bishop and archbishop in the basilica of Saint Peter, and on 28 April he was recognised as patriarch and received the pallium from the pope's hands at a secret consistory in the Vatican. Several years later his successor 'Abdisho' IV Maron claimed that Sulaqa had been proclaimed patriarch in the church of Saint Peter in the presence of fifty archbishops, a hundred bishops and a crowd of 4,000 jubilant onlookers; but his account is decisively contradicted by the surviving Vatican records. The new patriarch probably took the reign name Shem'on, which had by now become traditional in the Church of the East, as the Vatican normally referred to him as 'Simon', but other sources mention his Christian name Yohannan, and he is therefore sometimes styled Yohannan VIII. There is no evidence that either he or the Vatican ever used this title. As far as the Vatican was concerned, the eighth patriarch in the line of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to bear the name Yohannan was the nineteenth-century Chaldean patriarch Yohannan VIII Hormizd (1830–7).

Sulaqa's confirmation by the Vatican in April 1553 as an independent Catholic patriarch created a permanent schism in the Church of the East. The blame for this schism does not lie with the Vatican, which had acted in good faith throughout, but with Sulaqa and his deceitful supporters. The Vatican only discovered a few years later that Shem'on VII Isho'yahb was very much alive. By then it was too late. What had been done could not be undone, and for the next four centuries the history of the Church of the East would be dominated by the rivalry between its Catholic and Nestorian branches.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

The Church of the East in 1348. According to the fourteenth-century historian 'Amr ibn Mattai, the Church of the East had twenty-seven metropolitan provinces in 1348. So little is known about the Nestorian Church at this period that this rare contemporary testimony has too often been treated with a respect that it does not really deserve. In fact, there are considerable difficulties in accepting

‘Amr’s evidence. He began by listing the familiar seven metropolitan provinces in Mesopotamia: (i) Elam; (ii) Nisibis; (iii) Maishan; (iv) Mosul; (v) Erbil; (vi) Beth Garmai; and (vii) Hulwan. On the face of it, this list seems reasonable, but it is by no means clear whether the traditional provinces of Maishan, Beth Garmai and Hulwan still existed in the middle of the fourteenth century. There are even more problems with the other twenty provinces, which were listed in the following order: (viii) Jerusalem; (ix) Edessa; (x) Fars; (xi) Merv; (xii) Herat; (xiii) Soqotra; (xiv) Beth Sinaye; (xv) India; (xvi) Barda^a; (xvii) Damascus; (xviii) Rai; (xix) Tabaristan; (xx) Dailam; (xxi) Samarqand; (xxii) Beth Turkaye; (xxiii) ‘Halaha’; (xxiv) Segestan; (xxv) Khanbaliq and al-Faliq; (xxvi) Tangut; and (xxvii) Kashgar and Nevaketh. This list is full of errors. Edessa briefly had a Nestorian bishop in the early years of the seventh century, but was never a metropolitan province. Soqotra, too, was a diocese but not a metropolis. Tabaristan and Beth Turkaye are doublets for Rai and Samarqand; and Segestan, if not a doublet for Herat, was only briefly a metropolitan province during the reign of Timothy I, who consecrated a metropolitan for Sarbaz who never reached his province. It is highly unlikely that metropolitans were being appointed in the fourteenth century for the traditional provinces of Fars, Rai, Barda^a and Dailam, as Christianity had long ago died out in these regions, and doubtful whether there were still metropolitans for Merv and Herat. It is also unlikely that the old province of Beth Sinaye still existed, as China was by then under the jurisdiction of the metropolitans of Tangut and Katai and Ong. Balkh, if that is the city meant by ‘Amr’s mysterious ‘Halaha’, is not attested in any other source as a metropolitan province.

Rather than reproducing the actual episcopal organisation of the mid-fourteenth century, ‘Amr evidently aggregated all the metropolitan provinces recorded between the Sasanian and the Mongol period, duplicating them where they were listed under variant names and promoting one or two outlying dioceses to metropolitan status, to produce an ‘ideal’ composite picture that never quite corresponded to reality at any point in time. ‘Abdisho^c of Nisibis had done exactly the same thing a generation earlier in his *Nomocanon*, amending the text of the acts of the synod of Isaac in 410 to produce a composite list of all dioceses in the province of Nisibis between the fifth and the thirteenth centuries. ‘Amr’s list, therefore, does not represent the episcopal organisation of the Nestorian Church as it actually was in 1348. There may have been around fifteen metropolitan provinces at this period, but certainly nothing like twenty-seven. Nevertheless, he was surely accurate in portraying a Church whose horizons still stretched far beyond Kurdistan. He could not have drawn up such a list if it bore no resemblance at all to reality, and his portrait of a Church still widely extended throughout Mesopotamia, Persia, Central Asia, India and China must be accepted.

The Mesopotamian and Western Provinces. By the middle of the sixteenth century the classical organisation of the Church of the East had disappeared. The Nestorian settlements in India were all that survived of the Church of the East's once-extensive exterior provinces. A few Christians could still be found in Central Asia and northern China, and small Nestorian communities also persisted at Hormuz and on the island of Soqatra. But these communities had no bishops, and were eventually doomed to extinction. In the west there were small Nestorian communities in Jerusalem and Aleppo and on the island of Cyprus, but they too no longer had bishops. In the Mesopotamian heartland of the Church of the East, there were outlying Nestorian congregations in the larger towns of the Tigris valley—Amid, Mardin, Seert, Hesna d'Kifa and Gazarta—and the nearby villages. Further to the south there were still scattered groups of Nestorians in the Erbil and Kirkuk districts. In Persia, Tabriz may still have had a small Nestorian community. But most members of the Church of the East were now confined to the towns and villages that lay between Mosul and Lakes Van and Urmia. This region, which had earlier been divided between the metropolitan provinces of Nisibis and Mosul, had always been the densest area of Nestorian settlement. The Church of the East had shrunk back into its traditional core territories.

It is possible that several Nestorian dioceses in Iraq were destroyed during the savage campaigns of Timur Leng in western Asia between 1380 and 1405. The Jacobite centre of Tagrit in the Tirhan district was sacked by Timur, and the neighbouring Nestorian communities in Beth Garmai and Adiabene may have been treated in a similar fashion. In the absence of a better context the disappearance of the traditional Nestorian dioceses of Beth Waziq, Beth Daron (Radhan), Tirhan and Daquqa, all of which had bishops earlier in the fourteenth century, may have been a result of Timur's campaigns. In Elam the archdiocese of Jundishapur (last mentioned in 1318) and the dioceses of Susa and Shushter (last mentioned in 1281) may also have come to an end at this period. Timur's campaigns seem also to have stimulated a migration of Nestorian Christians into the hills of the Bohtan and Hakkari regions and into the villages of the Urmia plain, though probably not on the scale of the thirteenth-century exodus to the Urmia region. Evidence for a substantial increase in the Nestorian population of the Bohtan, Hakkari and Urmia regions can be found in the creation of three new dioceses in these regions during the 'dark centuries'. A diocese was created in the fifteenth century for Atel and Bohtan, several of whose bishops are known. The diocese of Berwari, first attested in the sixteenth century, may have been created at around the same time. By 1553 there was also a new diocese for Adarbaigan, whose name recalled the Nestorian metropolitan province founded at Tabriz in the Mongol period. The sixteenth-century bishops of Adarbaigan, however,

resided not in Tabriz but in the humble village of Gawilan in the Urmia plain, where their successors are attested from the eighteenth century onwards.

It is clear, therefore, that despite its demise in southern Mesopotamia, Nestorian Christianity continued to flourish in its northern Mesopotamian heartland. Although Nestorian communities disappeared from several villages in the Nisibis and Mosul regions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, patterns of settlement seem generally to have persisted without radical disturbance. Although insufficient information has survived to be certain, there may well have been a continuous succession of bishops in the archdioceses of Nisibis, Mosul and Erbil, and perhaps also in the dioceses of Hesna d'Kifa, Gazarta, Salmas and Urmia. There may even have been brief gains from time to time. The new town of Sultaniyya, the summer capital of the il-khans during the middle decades of the fourteenth century, is reputed to have had twenty-five churches during its brief period of eminence, and probably had a Nestorian bishop for a few years. At the same time, however, several dioceses that had existed since Sasanian times disappeared between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the province of Nisibis, the dioceses of Balad, Tamanon and Shigar came mysteriously to an end. Bishops of Balad and Shigar are last reliably mentioned at the consecration of Timothy II in 1318. In the province of Mosul, the traditional dioceses of Beth Nuhadra, Beth Bgash, Marga and Hnitha faded out in much the same way. The Hakkari districts of Baz and Jilu were probably included in the diocese of Beth Dasen before the fourteenth century, but the colophon of a manuscript copied in 1488 in the village of Beth Salam in Baz mentions the metropolitan of Mosul but not the bishop of Beth Dasen. In all probability, the diocese of Beth Dasen was no longer in existence by then, though it would be hazardous to reach such a conclusion purely on the evidence of a single manuscript colophon.

In fact, so little is known about this period that it is at present impossible to say whether these traditional dioceses lapsed in the fourteenth, fifteenth, or even the sixteenth century. It is tempting to see such a traumatic break with the past as the consequence of a radical reorganisation, and Timur's campaigns at the end of the fourteenth century would offer one obvious context for such a break. Alternatively, the disappearance of the old dioceses may have been the consequence of the introduction of hereditary succession in the middle of the fifteenth century by the patriarch Shem'on IV Basidi. This policy eventually resulted in a critical shortage of bishops in the Church of the East and provoked the schism of 1552. The patriarch Shem'on VII Isho'yahb (1539–58) was forced to entrust the administration of some vacant dioceses to laymen and to consecrate two young nephews as metropolitans because no older relatives were available. By 1552, when matters came to a head, the Church of the East had only three

bishops left, for the dioceses of Salmas, Erbil and Adarbaigan. It may be that many other dioceses had remained vacant for decades and were only formally abolished after the schism of 1552. Several new dioceses were created for the towns of the Tigris plain in the 1550s by both Shemʿon VII Ishoʿyahb and his Catholic opponents, and the redeployment of the few available bishops to the places where they were felt to be most needed offers another plausible context for a radical reorganisation.

The Nestorian communities in Syria, Palestine and Cilicia disappeared during this period, though the Nestorians kept up a presence in Jerusalem. Their participation in the Easter Day ceremonies was noticed by numerous European visitors to the city between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Niccolo of Poggibonsi, writing in 1346, stated that the Nestorians had a station behind the apse in the northern part of the Church of the Resurrection, and that on Palm Sunday they congregated in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the other Christian groups, 'on one side the Greeks, the Christians of the Girdle and the Nestorians, and on the other side the Nubians, the Jacobites, the Georgians and the Latins'. Niccolo also visited the Egyptian port of Damietta in 1346, where he mentioned that there was a Nestorian church of Mart Maryam next to the church of the Franks. This church may have been built by the Nestorian refugee community mentioned at Damietta in 1217 by Jacques de Vitry. Alternatively, it might have been built more recently to serve a small trading community.

A Nestorian merchant community was also established in Cyprus after the fall of Acre in 1292. After the destruction of the Frankish kingdoms in Syria and Palestine, Cyprus became the forward base for crusading activity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and Famagusta replaced Acre as a centre for trade with the cities of northern Syria and Cilicia. By the end of the fourteenth century the island was the seat of a Nestorian metropolitan, who seems to have inherited the title of Tarsus. The Latin Church exerted considerable pressure on this heretical community. In 1326 Pope John XXII instructed the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem to extirpate the 'Jacobite and Nestorian heresies' in Cyprus by whatever means he chose, and in 1340 the Nestorian metropolitan Eliya of Cyprus made a Catholic profession of faith. Despite his submission, a distinct Nestorian community was still in existence in Cyprus a century later. In 1445 the Nestorian metropolitan Timothy 'of Tarsus' also made a Catholic profession of faith. To distinguish these converts from their recalcitrant Nestorian brethren, Pope Eugene IV christened them 'Chaldeans', because they used the Chaldean language (as Syriac was then called in Western Europe). Once again the metropolitan was unable to bring over all his congregation, and a brief prepared in 1450 by Pope Nicholas V for the archbishop of Nicosia mentioned that many of the 'Chaldeans' had

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'already returned to Nestorianism'. In 1472 a bull of Pope Sixtus IV confined the jurisdiction of the Chaldean bishops to the towns in which they resided, enabling Catholic missionaries to work without hindrance among their congregations in the country villages. The Venetians, who succeeded the Lusignans as rulers of Cyprus in 1489, applied a rigid policy of Latinisation, and many of the island's Nestorians and Chaldeans were probably assimilated into the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. By the middle of the sixteenth century the remaining Nestorians were confined to the town of Famagusta. This community was dispersed within a few decades of the town's capture by the Turks in 1571, but a fine fourteenth-century Nestorian church, built in Provençal style by the wealthy merchant prince Francis Lakhas, can still be seen in Famagusta.

The Exterior Provinces. The exterior provinces of the Church of the East in Asia, with the important exception of India, appear to have collapsed during the middle decades of the fourteenth century. Although little is known of the circumstances of the demise of the Nestorian dioceses in Central Asia (which may never have fully recovered from the destruction caused by the Mongols a century earlier), their extinction was probably due to a combination of persecution, disease and isolation. Several contemporaries, including the papal envoy John of Marignolli, mention the murder of the Latin bishop Richard and six of his companions in 1339 or 1340 by a Muslim mob in Almaliq, the chief city of Tangut, and the forcible conversion of the city's Christians to Islam. The latest tombstones in the Tokmak and Pishpek cemeteries near Semirechensk (in modern Kyrgyzstan) date from 1342, and several commemorate deaths during a plague in 1338. The collapse of Nestorian Christianity in Central Asia was probably so complete because it had always been the custom of the Church of the East to send out bishops from Mesopotamia to the dioceses of the 'exterior provinces'. In the chaos which followed Abu Sa'id's death in 1335 it may have been unable to send out fresh bishops to central Asia, and without leaders of their own, the absorption of these communities by Islam was inevitable. The Spanish ambassador Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo mentioned Christian merchants at the court of 'Timur Leng in Samarqand in 1404, including 'Greeks, Armenians, Catholics, Jacobites and Nestorians', but courts were obvious magnets for traders from distant parts, and the Nestorian merchants in question had probably travelled to Samarqand from northern Iraq.

During the first half of the fourteenth century there was a brief flourishing of Nestorian Christianity in China. Nestorian Christians returned gradually to China during the thirteenth century in the wake of the Mongol armies. Several Christians, indeed, accompanied the Mongols in the campaigns in China during the third quarter of the thirteenth century as siege engineers. There are references to

isolated individuals in various parts of China as early as 1200, but the Nestorians only appear only to have settled in China in some strength after the collapse of the southern Sung dynasty in 1279. Their numbers, never high, probably peaked in the 1330s, when John of Cora estimated that there were around 30,000 Nestorian Christians in China. They came to China as merchants, administrators and monks; and this time, unlike in the T'ang dynasty, small colonies of Nestorian Christians could be found in most major Chinese cities. Marco Polo, who lived in China from 1271 to 1293, mentioned Christian communities, often as few as 'three or four families', living in most of the towns he visited. In 1289 a special government department, the *Ch'ung-fu-szu* or Office for Christian Clergy, was established to supervise their activities.

There are frequent references to Nestorian Christians in Mongol China both in the gazetteers and bureaucratic records of individual Chinese towns and in the reports of Latin missionaries. They have also left many traces of their presence behind them. A large number of Nestorian Christian tombstones have been found in Ch'uan-chou and other Chinese cities, typically with inscriptions in both Syriac and Chinese. The University of Hong Kong also possesses a collection of hundreds of fourteenth-century bronze Nestorian crosses from the Ongut region, collected during the 1920s by a British postal official working in northern China. Although their designs vary, Maltese crosses with a square central panel displaying a swastika are common. This use of a Buddhist symbol on a Christian emblem has been hailed in some quarters as evidence of syncretism, as though the Ongut were not quite sure whether they were Christians or Buddhists. They were, of course, Christians, and they used the swastika simply because in China it was a symbol of good fortune.

The fourteenth-century representatives of the Church of the East seem not to have known that there had been a Nestorian mission to China several centuries earlier, even though references to the T'ang province of Beth Sinaye doubtless survived in the Church's archives in Baghdad. In official correspondence Nestorian Christians were referred to as the *yeh-li-k'o-wen*, probably a Chinese transliteration of the Turkish word *arkhun* ('fair-skinned'), or as *tarsa* ('God-fearers'), a Persian term that had long been applied to the Christians of Iran. The Nestorians' own name for Christianity was no longer 'the Syrian brilliant teaching' but simply 'the teachings of the *yeh-li-k'o-wen*', a colourless expression found in several official contexts.

In T'ang China the Nestorians had had the mission field to themselves, but they now faced competition from Catholic missionaries from Europe. The two Churches spent most of their energies quarrelling with one another. Nestorian and Latin priests competed for the allegiance of the Ongut tribe, converted

to Christianity by the Nestorians two centuries earlier. John of Montecorvino, the Franciscan archbishop of Khanbalik from 1308 until his death in 1328, struggled to keep Alan Christian mercenaries in the Mongol imperial guard firm in the orthodox faith and safe from the errors of Nestorius. Neither Church seemed to be greatly interested in preaching the gospel to the Chinese. John of Montecorvino had the Bible translated into Turkish and Persian, the languages of Khanbalik's foreign residents, but not into Chinese. Christian priests in Yuan China probably guessed that the Chinese would be unreceptive to a foreign religion associated with the unpopular rule of the Mongols. Their own behaviour was not always a good advertisement for their religion. A Nestorian Christian administrator, Mar Sargis, abused his position as governor (*darugha*) of Chinkiang to build Christian monasteries on land which he had confiscated from a Buddhist temple. Christians were resented as foreigners who had taken advantage of Mongol rule to feather their nests in China, and it is therefore scarcely surprising that in 1368 both Latin and Nestorian Christians were driven from China along with their Mongol protectors.

There are few references to Christians in Yuan China later than 1340, probably because the roads across Central Asia had been cut, and the Office for Christian Clergy is last mentioned in 1351. The Ming revolution against the Mongols in the 1360s, which swept through China from south to north, was strongly patriotic in character, and references to foreigners in Chinese cities cease after these cities passed under Ming control. The Mongol capital Khanbalik (modern Peking) fell in 1368, and China thereafter retreated into a long period of isolation from the outside world. The two Nestorian metropolitan provinces in China, Tangut and Katai and Ong, now lapsed, and the next wave of Christians to arrive in China, nearly two hundred years later, were Roman Catholics from Europe. They came by sea, as it was now no longer possible to travel overland through Central Asia, and they found that the work of evangelism had to begin all over again, as scarcely the faintest memory of Christianity had survived in China.

It is not certain how long the demoralised Nestorian communities in Central Asia and China survived after the collapse of the Mongol Empire. Perhaps a generation or two was sufficient to see the extinction of Christianity in most of the lands once ruled by the Mongols. Here and there, however, Christianity may have lingered on for a few decades longer. Poggio Bracciolini, writing around 1440, mentioned that a Nestorian priest had recently arrived in Italy 'from upper India towards the north'. He hailed from a Christian kingdom twenty days' journey from Cathay, and had been sent by his 'patriarch' to pay his respects to the pope. Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli also mentioned this embassy in a letter of 1474, though he took the liberty of elevating the Nestorian priest into an envoy

from the Great Khan himself. According to Poggio, the language barrier had made it difficult to extract information from this exotic visitor, but it is at least possible that there were still Christians among the Kerait or Ongut as late as the middle of the fifteenth century. Some Christians in these regions may even have survived for a century longer. In 1558 Anthony Jenkinson, an English official of the Muscovy Company, travelled from Mangyshlak on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea to Urgench and Bukhara. On both sides of the Syr Darya, in what had once been the Nestorian metropolitan province of Beth Turkiye, he met only Muslims. But he was told that 'fair-skinned' Christians could still be found in Cathay, who spoke a language that distinguished them from the Tartars. Half a century later Jenkinson's testimony was strikingly confirmed by the first Jesuit missionaries in China. An elderly Jew in Peking told them that when he was a boy, around 1550, people in northern China still used to cross themselves, but the custom had since fallen into disuse. The Jesuits seem to have missed the last Nestorian Christians in China by a mere fifty years.

Only in India did the Church of the East retain a substantial presence, and at the beginning of the sixteenth century the extent of the Indian Church was smaller than it had been several centuries earlier. The small Christian presence in Ceylon had been extinguished by the end of the thirteenth century, and by the end of the fifteenth century Christianity seems also to have been extinct in northwest India. The Nestorian bishops who travelled to India in 1503 went directly from Hormuz to Quilon on the Malabar Coast, bypassing the northern port of Tana, which had a small Nestorian community as late as the fourteenth century. At an earlier period there had been small Nestorian communities in Pegu, Cochinchina, Tonkin and Siam, but by now Christianity had vanished from Vietnam. In 1506 Louis de Varthema met in Bengal some Christian merchants who came from Sarnam (Ayuthya), the capital of Siam. He accompanied them to Pegu, where the king had 'a thousand' Christians in his service. It is not clear whether these Christians were Armenians or Nestorians, but it is possible that they were Nestorians from the Malabar Coast.

On the eastern coast of India, Nestorian Christianity was also dying out. Small Christian communities could still be found on the Coromandel Coast, but the celebrated shrine of Saint Thomas at Meliapur, for long an important centre of pilgrimage for Christians of every denomination, fell into disuse in the early years of the sixteenth century. The letter of 1504 stated that it had been deserted some years previously but had been recently revived by a group of Christians, 'who are wearying themselves in rebuilding it'. In 1516, however, the Portuguese explorer Barbosa found the church of Saint Thomas at Meliapur half in ruins and grown round with jungle. By the beginning of the sixteenth century the main strength

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of the Saint Thomas Christians lay on the Malabar Coast, where it remains to this day. According to Diogo da Couto, writing in 1611, the Christian settlements along the Malabar Coast were confined to a coastal strip some two hundred miles long, running roughly from Trivandrum in the south to Calicut in the north and covering the modern districts of Trivandrum, Quilon, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Trichur, Palghat and Calicut. The letter of 1504 stated that there were about twenty towns in this region, of which the three strongest and most populous were Cranganore, Parur and Quilon, and estimated its Christian population at about 30,000 families. This figure is distinctly more believable than Portuguese estimates of 100,000 or 200,000 families, though it too may have been exaggerated. The letter also mentioned that the community was building new churches.

The Portuguese found the Malabar Christians divided into two distinct social groups, called respectively Vadakumbagar ('northerners') and Thekumbagar ('southerners'). While all the Indian Christians claimed that their Church had been founded in the first century by the apostle Thomas, the 'southerners' also asserted that it had received a vital reinforcement in the fourth century, during the 'forty-year persecution' of Shapur II. According to their tradition, an Armenian merchant named Thomas of Cana had led a party of 272 Christians from 'Jerusalem, Baghdad and Nineveh' to India to escape persecution. He had landed at Maliamkara near Cranganore in 345, and bought a piece of land from the local king. This land had remained in the hands of the Christians of Cranganore ever since, and they still possessed a number of copper plates inscribed with the treaty assigning the land to their church. The 'southerners', who were greatly outnumbered by the 'northerners' (their numbers were estimated at only around 5,000 in the middle of the seventeenth century), lived mostly around Quilon and Kottayam, and claimed to be descended from Thomas of Cana and his companions.

During the first decade of the sixteenth century, thanks to the initiative of the patriarch Eliya V in 1503, there were four Nestorian bishops in India: the metropolitan Yahballaha and his suffragans Ya'qob, Denha and Yohannan. Three of these bishops seem to have died not long after their arrival in India, but Ya'qob ministered to the Saint Thomas Christians for half a century until his death, at a ripe old age, in 1553. For most of this period he was ignored by the Portuguese, but in his declining years they occasionally indulged him. He was chiefly valued by the Indian Christians as a symbol that they still belonged to the Church of the East, and had far less power than he would have done in any of the Mesopotamian dioceses. The Church in India was run by archdeacons, not by bishops. Because the laity of the Indian Church did not speak Syriac, a metropolitan or bishop did not enjoy the same close relationship with his flock as he would have done in

Iraq. By the sixteenth century it had become traditional for the archdeacon to be a native Indian, and to be responsible for most of the practical administration of the Church. The metropolitan or bishop, when there was one, was treated with the courtesy appropriate to his rank, and revered as the spiritual director of the Church, but the archdeacon was the real power in the land.

MONASTICISM

Decline and Revival. At some point in the fourteenth or fifteenth century the Church of the East lost its remaining monasteries to the south of Baghdad. For centuries, every Nestorian patriarch had visited the monastery of Dorqoni after his consecration to pay homage to the relics of Mar Mari. Dorqoni now disappeared, as did the few other monasteries in Beth Aramaye, Maishan and Beth Huzaye still attested in the thirteenth century. Denha II, consecrated in 1336/7 under the protection of the Christian emir Hajji Togai, was probably the last Nestorian patriarch to make the pilgrimage to Mar Mari's tomb. The patriarchal monastery in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, where successive Nestorian patriarchs had been consecrated for nearly a millennium in the great church of Kokhe, was also abandoned. To the north of Baghdad, the surviving evidence is insufficient to enable any firm conclusions to be drawn. The monastery of Mar Mikha'il of Tar'il near Erbil, the seat of the patriarch Timothy II, disappeared. The fate of the remains of the patriarch Yahballaha III, which had been reinterred there after the confiscation of the monastery of Saint John the Baptist near Maragha, is not known. The monastery of Mar Ezekiel near Daquqa in Beth Garmai also disappeared. The monasteries of Beth Qoqa near Erbil, Mar Awgin near Nisibis, Mar Yohannan the Egyptian and Mar Ahha the Egyptian near Gazarta, Mar Eliya near Mosul and Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh, along with several other smaller foundations, survived into the sixteenth century, but it is not clear whether they were continuously occupied throughout the 'dark centuries' or whether, as happened in the eighteenth century with the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, they were abandoned, locked up and left in the hands of a caretaker for decades at a time. Four or five of the very few Syriac manuscripts that have survived from the fifteenth century were copied in the monasteries of Beth Qoqa, Mar Awgin and Rabban Hormizd, but their numbers are too few to justify a conclusion that these monasteries were continuously occupied. According to the colophon of 1484 that recorded the recovery of the Church of the East during the reign of the benevolent Ya'qub, 'the ruined monasteries were restored', so it is on the whole more likely that they were not.

Traces of the recovery of both the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches at the end of the fifteenth century and in the first half of the sixteenth century have survived. A considerable number of Jacobite monasteries were restored during this period, and there is also evidence, though less direct, for the restoration of Nestorian monasteries. Early in the sixteenth century the Nestorian liturgy was revised, probably on the initiative of the patriarch Shemʿon VI. A number of traditional saints and martyrs were no longer commemorated, and were replaced by others, of whom a strikingly large number were founders of monasteries. It has been persuasively argued that these liturgical changes reflect a resurgence of pilgrimage to newly-restored monasteries, creating a demand for details of the lives of their founders. Most of the founders now commemorated were connected with monasteries in the Nisibis and Gazarta regions, and colophon evidence suggests that at least ten monasteries near Gazarta were restored during Yaʿqub's reign, including the monasteries of Mar Yohannan the Egyptian and Mar Ahha the Egyptian. Perhaps significantly, the Indian delegates who visited Mesopotamia at the end of the fifteenth century met the patriarch Shemʿon V in the monastery of Mar Yohannan, not in one of the Mosul monasteries; while the bishops consecrated for India were all monks of the monastery of Mar Awgin near Nisibis. It may have been at this period, too, that the Jacobite monastery of Mar Daniel near Mosul, attested as the residence of the maphrian Gregory Bar Sawma at the end of the thirteenth century, was appropriated by the Nestorians. This insect-infested convent, nicknamed 'the monastery of the Beetles' (*Habshushyatha*) by its hapless monks, was included in a list of Nestorian monasteries compiled by the patriarch Eliya VIII in 1607, and remained in the hands of the Nestorians and their Chaldean successors for the next three centuries.

Although the monasteries of the Gazarta district were clearly of great importance at this period, there was also considerable activity further to the east. Surviving inscriptions record the restoration of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh towards the end of the fifteenth century, and when Shemʿon IV Basidi died in 1497 his body was buried in a marble tomb in the monastery. Perhaps Rabban Hormizd was chosen because, in its mountain sanctuary, it seemed marginally safer than one of the Gazarta monasteries. At any rate, Shemʿon's interment started a tradition. For the next three centuries nearly all of the Nestorian patriarchs were buried in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. Their epitaphs, in almost every case, are graced by an elaborate Nestorian confession of faith.

Monasticism in Mongol China. Remarkably, more is known about the Nestorian monasteries in China in the first half of the fourteenth century than about their

Mesopotamian counterparts. The Mongol conquest of China allowed Nestorian missionaries to return in force, and Chinese local histories often mention the existence of Christian churches and monasteries in their districts. The Nestorians of Chinkiang, a medium-sized town on the Yangtze river, received a particularly bad press. They are mentioned in several sources, both Western and Chinese, and the evidence from these texts coheres in a most satisfying manner. A local history of Chinkiang written in 1333 mentions that the town's former governor Mar Sargis had misused his position to build seven Nestorian monasteries, five in Chinkiang itself and two more further afield. Mar Sargis, who is also mentioned by Marco Polo, was a Nestorian Christian from Samarqand, and was appointed *darugha* of Chinkiang in 1278. The monasteries were built almost immediately after he took up his post. The 1333 history recorded the names of all seven monasteries, transliterating the Syriac word *'umra* ('monastery') into Chinese as *bu-mu-la*. The *Ma-li Chieh-wa-li-chi-su bu-mu-la* was obviously a monastery dedicated to Mar Giwargis, but the other six names are not so easy to decipher. Two of the monasteries were built on land confiscated from nearby Buddhist temples, but in 1311 the Buddhists won an important lawsuit against the Christians. Their land was returned to them, and they were awarded custody of the two Christian monasteries that now stood on it. A Buddhist text celebrating this famous victory mentions that the 'images' of the *yeh-li-k'o-wen* were torn down and destroyed, and that the two buildings were repainted, adorned with statues of Buddha and relaunched as Buddhist temples. Although the Nestorians remained in Chinkiang for another five decades, clinging to the three other monasteries built there by Mar Sargis and to a fourth monastery founded in 1295 by a man named Mark, a similar fate eventually lay in store for all the Nestorian monasteries in China when the Mongol dynasty fell in 1368.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Fourteenth-Century Nestorian Literature. William Wright concluded his classic 1887 survey of Syriac literature for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* with the two outstanding authors of the late thirteenth century, the Jacobite Bar Hebraeus and the Nestorian 'Abdisho' of Nisibis. 'After 'Abdisho'', Wright asserted, with only the briefest of glances towards the literary achievements of the patriarch Timothy II, 'there are hardly any names among the Nestorians worthy of a place in the literary history of the Syrian nation'. It is sometimes thought that the literature of the Church of the East simply dried up during the fourteenth century, never to revive, and Wright's dismissal of post-Mongol literature has perhaps contributed to this

misleading impression. But although Syriac literature never quite dried up, Wright's judgement was fundamentally correct. The literature of the 'dark centuries', despite occasional attempts to talk it up, rarely compares in quality with the output of the classical age of the Church of the East. Its interest, at least to historians, lies mainly in the fact that so little is known about this period that any evidence, even the evidence of mediocre poetry, is welcome.

By a fortunate chance, the acts of the synod of Timothy II in 1318, written by the metropolitan 'Abdisho' of Nisibis only weeks before his own death, have survived. A careful reading of the provisions of the canons dealing with church and monastic discipline sheds valuable light on the abuses that must have occurred during the long patriarchate of Timothy's predecessor Yahballaha III. Yahballaha had only a limited grasp of Syriac, making it difficult for him to effectively supervise the administration of the Church. The officials of the patriarchal cell were not known for their honesty, at least if Mari is to be believed, and it would not have been difficult for Yahballaha's corrupt subordinates to evade the patriarch's scrutiny. Timothy himself was the author of a work *On the Seven Sacraments of the Church*, a seventeenth-century copy of which has survived and is preserved in the Vatican Library. The book, dedicated to the otherwise unknown 'priest and monk Bar Sawma', is arranged in seven chapters, following the conventional order of the sacraments, and its contents have been conveniently summarised by Assemani. Timothy may also have been the anonymous author of the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*, if Heleen Murre-van den Berg's hypothesis is correct. If so, his reputation as an author would rise considerably.

Thereafter, the fourteenth century is chiefly memorable for the revision, around 1330, of Mari ibn Sulaiman's twelfth-century *Book of the Tower* by 'Amr ibn Mattai, and its slightly later recension by the priest Sliba ibn Yuhanna of Mosul. 'Amr, who has been claimed on uncertain evidence to have been a bishop of Tirhan, abridged Mari's voluminous history of the patriarchs of the Church of the East, but he also included some valuable new details and continued Mari's chronicle of events from the reign of 'Abdisho' III (1139–48) down as far as the death of Yahballaha III in 1317. Sliba ibn Yuhanna, who may have lived in Cyprus for part of his life (a Nestorian manuscript in Arabic was copied in Famagusta in 1335 by a certain Sliba ibn Yuhanna, of Mosul), took 'Amr's work a stage further, bringing its coverage down to 1332. Both men composed in Arabic, and in both cases only a single, mutilated, text of their work has survived, now safely preserved in the Vatican. As 'Amr and Sliba are dependent on Mari for most of their material, and did not improve on their predecessor's prose style, they are normally read merely as an adjunct to Mari. All the same, their texts do have an independent value, and it would be unthinkable for a modern scholar to

write a history of the Church of the East without consulting all three historians. Between them, these three diligent Nestorian chroniclers have preserved most of what is known of the history of the Church of the East under the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs.

After Sliba, the Nestorians seem to have stopped writing the history of their Church for three centuries. Occasional local narratives have survived, sometimes in the form of lengthy colophons prompted by an event that gripped a scribe's imagination, and the historian is forced to use this scattered and unrepresentative evidence to attempt to reconstruct the history of the Church of the East during the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It is possible to write a detailed history of the Jacobite Church during the 'dark centuries'—though nobody has yet attempted one—but not a detailed history of the Church of the East. The reason for this reticence is not clear. Patriarchs like Denha II, living in some state in Karamlish, could have supplied modern scholars with interesting information had they chosen to do so, but they did not. Perhaps they were ashamed of the steep decline in the fortunes of their Church. Perhaps the relevant manuscripts have simply been lost. At any rate, no more histories have come down to us. Instead, the only Nestorian compositions from the late fourteenth century to survive are a few samples of rather undistinguished verse from the priest Abel Shikko ('the Raptured'), who seems to have been writing between 1380 and 1400.

Nestorian Literature in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries. The fifteenth century is represented by a mere two Nestorian authors. The priest Isaac Shbadnaya flourished around the middle of the century. Isaac, a native of the Sindi district to the northeast of Zakho, wrote a number of verse '*onyatha*', several of which have survived. The lengthy '*onitha*' 'On the Economy of Salvation', conventionally dated to around 1440, is intricately composed in an acrostic design, contains a distractingly large number of unusual Greek loanwords, and includes a long series of '*nubhare*', 'explanations', which elaborate on the doctrinal content of the earlier verses. One of Isaac's shorter poems is a prayer for the Christians to be delivered from their dreadful Turkish, Kurdish and Arab neighbours. Such a prayer could have been composed at almost any period in the history of the Church of the East from the eleventh century onwards, and does not provide a great deal of help in dating Isaac's work. The scholarly metropolitan Isho'yahb bar Mqaddam of Erbil, Isaac's contemporary and one of the few fifteenth-century Nestorian bishops whose name is known, wrote a number of works around 1450, including an '*onitha*' on the commemoration of Mar Giwargis, riddles, and a *Treasury of Grammatical Questions*. He also collated the text of Eliya of Anbar's *Book of Centuries*.

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Alphonse Mingana, who had a formidable command of Syriac literature, praised Isho'yahb's 'pure and classical' style and fine writing.

The renewal of monastic life towards the end of the fifteenth century had a number of effects, one of which was a modest revival of Nestorian literature during the decades that preceded the schism of 1552. Around 1526 a number of liturgical and other works were written by Abraham of Kirkuk, a monk of the monastery of Mar Awgin near Nisibis. Sargis bar Wahle, who probably also flourished in the first half of the sixteenth century, wrote a verse history of the Nestorian patriarchs down to Timothy II, presumably based on Sliba's history. He has also been identified with Sargis of Adarbaigan, a monk of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd who wrote a verse *History of Rabban Hormizd the Persian* published by E. A. Wallis Budge in 1902 alongside its seventh-century prose exemplar by Hormizd's disciple Shem'on. The identification is attractive, as in both works the author tells his readers nothing they did not know already, but does so in intricate and elegant Syriac verse. Another important writer was the priest Sliba, son of David, of the Gazarta village of Mansuriya, who wrote a much-admired composition on Nestorius and a number of poems on the ravages of the Qizilbash in the Gazarta region in the first two decades of the sixteenth century. Sliba's historical poems, written between 1513 and 1531, were published and translated into French in 1910 by the Chaldean metropolitan Addai Scher in an important article, 'Épisodes de l'histoire du Kurdistan'.

One of the most interesting Nestorian literary survivals from the first half of the sixteenth century is a report on the state of Nestorian Christianity in India, in the form of a long letter written shortly after their arrival by the bishops sent to India in 1499 by the catholicus Shem'on V. Besides giving a valuable description of the various Nestorian communities on the Malabar Coast, this letter describes the recent arrival of the Portuguese in India. The brutal history of Portuguese imperial expansion in the sixteenth century was in most cases written only by the victors, and in South America and Africa the viewpoint of the conquered peoples has been almost entirely lost. In India, however, the Nestorian bishops were in a uniquely well-placed position to record the stages by which the Portuguese established their power. Their report, well-informed and factually accurate, although prejudiced in favour of the Portuguese, portrays the European Age of Discovery from an unusual angle. The Nestorian bishops enthusiastically applauded the colonisers. They marvelled at the modern cannon deployed by the Portuguese against the Indians, praised their military victories, won against vastly superior numbers, over the 'pagan' king of Calicut, and prayed that the extension of Frankish power would revive the drooping fortunes of Christianity in southern India. 'The land of these Franks is called Portugal, one of the Frankish regions,'

the letter concluded. 'Their king is called Emmanuel, and we pray that Emmanuel may protect him.' Unfortunately, it did not take long for the Portuguese to discover that the Indian Christians were heretical Nestorians. The initially cordial relations between the Western and Eastern Christians soured long before the Portuguese king Emmanuel I died in Lisbon in 1521.

Chapter Eight
NESTORIANS AND CHALDEANS
(1553–1830)

OVERVIEW

There had been schisms in the Church of the East before, nearly always in the form of a revolt against an illegitimate or unpopular patriarch, but they had rarely lasted more than one or two decades. The schism of 1552 probably started out like all of its predecessors, but Sulaqa's consecration by Julius III changed the rules of the game. As soon as the Vatican became involved, the schism became a doctrinal struggle. In the Vatican's eyes, Sulaqa was upholding the Catholic faith against Nestorian heresy. For the next three hundred years, the Vatican strove to expand its bridgehead in the Church of the East, and its decision to support the Catholic cause against the Nestorians ensured that the schism remained permanent. Catholic missionaries worked zealously among the heretics, gradually bringing over the Nestorians of the Tigris plain towns and the Salmas district in Persia and making inroads among the villages of the Mosul plain. Few Catholic missionaries visited the remote Hakkari mountains, and most of the Hakkari villagers remained Nestorian until the closing decades of the nineteenth century. By 1830 around a third of the total East Syrian population of Kurdistan was Catholic. The process of conversion was slow and laborious, achieved village by village, sometimes against determined opposition. The Nestorians often fought back, and on occasion were able to displace Catholic bishops and priests and restore the status quo. There was no love lost between the Catholics and the Nestorians, and they prosecuted their quarrel bitterly. Both sides appealed to the Turkish authorities, reinforcing their arguments with bribes, and the stakes could be high for the losers. Several bishops were bastinadoed by the Turks, and in some cases were imprisoned for years at a time. Sulaqa himself was tortured and murdered by the governor of ʿAmadiya, and there were other occasions where the fear of a similar fate forced bishops to flee from their dioceses.

The Vatican called its new Catholic converts 'Chaldeans', the name selected in 1445 by Pope Eugene IV for the Nestorians of Cyprus who had joined the Latin Church. The term had presumably acquired the respectability of long

usage, though it is doubtful whether the Cypriots had ever used the expression themselves. No one in the Vatican troubled to ask Sulaqa and his supporters whether they liked their new name, or they would have discovered that it had unwelcome associations. For the Syrians, the *Kaldaye* were above all the pagan magicians who had resisted the teachings of the earliest Persian Christians. Bar Hebraeus had teased the Nestorians several centuries earlier, calling them ‘children of the ancient Chaldeans’, the implication being that they were no better than pagans. As a result the new name never really caught on among the Syrians themselves until the nineteenth century, despite its regular use by the Vatican. Both factions continued simply to call themselves *Mshihaye*, ‘Christians’. When they wished to insult each other, which was most of the time, they used the terms *Frangaye* (‘Franks’) and *Nastoraye* (‘Nestorians’).

While the Catholic missionaries were slowly but surely making progress among the more accessible Nestorian villages, the rival patriarchs struggled to keep abreast of the situation on the ground. The history of the Church of the East between 1552 and 1830 is enormously complicated, as the allegiances of the patriarchs constantly fluctuated, depending on their perceptions of their own interest. Shemʿon IX Denha (1580–1600), the fourth patriarch of the uniate line founded by Sulaqa, abandoned Amid and withdrew to Salmas, to escape the attacks of the Nestorians and perhaps also to evade the intrusive supervision of the Vatican’s advisers. Denha’s own Catholicism was at best lukewarm, and after his successor Shemʿon X (1600–38) moved his patriarchal seat to the remote village of Kochanes in the Hakkari mountains, the patriarchs of the Shemʿon line soon returned to Nestorianism. One or two of them seem to have flirted with Catholicism, but risked their thrones by doing so. Since the seventeenth century, the Kochanes patriarchs have all, in theory, been Nestorians.

The future of Catholicism in the Church of the East ultimately lay with the Eliyas of Mosul, the lineal descendants of the impious Shemʿon VII Ishoʿyahb. Residing in the venerable monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh, the Mosul patriarchs controlled most of the Church’s assets, its oldest and finest monasteries and its most accomplished scribes, and also had the immense advantage of legitimacy. Rightly or wrongly, Sulaqa had been a rebel. The seventeenth century was therefore a period of solid achievement for the Mosul patriarchate. The Catholic movement temporarily lost its vigour, and only revived when the Chaldeans established a new Catholic patriarchal line in Amid in 1681, with the conversion of the Nestorian metropolitan Joseph. However, this unexpected development came after several decades in which the Mosul patriarchs had recovered their old authority in the western districts, consecrating Nestorian bishops for the Catholic dioceses founded by Sulaqa a century earlier.

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Scribal activity, previously concentrated in the Gazarta district, shifted to Mosul, to the nearby villages of Telkepe and Tel Isqof, and above all to Alqosh, whose Shikwana and Nasro families emerged in the second half of the century to establish a dominance which was not seriously challenged until the second half of the nineteenth century.

During the eighteenth century the Vatican's support for the Amid patriarchs was nuanced. Its long-term goal was the conversion of a Mosul patriarch, and when this happened the usefulness of the Amid patriarchate would come to an end. All that was needed was patience. Although the Mosul patriarchs remained Nestorian for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were more susceptible to the inexorable spread of Catholicism among their villages than the Shem'ons in remote Kochanes. In the seventeenth century things had seemed to go their way, but eventually they had to yield to Catholic pressure. In the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century Yohannan Hormizd, the nephew and *natar kursya* of the Mosul patriarch Eliya XII Denha (1722–78), converted to Catholicism after the patriarchal succession was claimed by his Nestorian cousin Isho'yahb. He was recognised by the Vatican as patriarchal administrator in 1780, and from 1830 onwards as patriarch. The fifty-year patriarchal administration and subsequent seven-year reign of Yohannan VIII Hormizd (1830–7) was one of the most acrimonious periods in the turbulent history of the Church of the East, and he was hardly the patriarch the Vatican would have chosen if it had been free to consult its own wishes. But his conversion was decisive. In 1828 the Amid patriarchate was suppressed and its dioceses were added to those of the Mosul patriarchate, and in 1830 Yohannan Hormizd was recognised as patriarch of Babylon and leader of a united Chaldean Catholic Church. The modern Chaldean Church, which now numbers nearly twice as many members as its Nestorian counterpart, was effectively born in 1830.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Rival Patriarchates, 1553–1620. Fortified with the blessing of the Vatican, the Catholic patriarch Yohannan Sulaqa returned to Mesopotamia towards the end of 1553, established himself in Amid, and immediately began to strengthen his position. In December 1553 he obtained documents from the Turkish authorities recognising him as head of the Chaldean nation 'after the example of all the patriarchs', and during a stay of five months in Amid consecrated metropolitans for Gazarta and Hesna d'Kifa and for three new dioceses, Amid, Mardin and Seert. Such a blatant challenge to the Nestorians could not be overlooked. Sulaqa's rival

Shem'on VII Isho'yahb responded by consecrating metropolitans for Nisibis and Gazarta in 1554 (both probably young relatives), and also won over the governor of 'Amadiya, who invited Sulaqa to 'Amadiya, imprisoned him for four months, tortured him and finally put him to death in January 1555. The hapless patriarch is said to have been sewn up in a sack and tossed into a lake to drown.

Shem'on VII Isho'yahb died himself shortly afterwards, in 1558, and was succeeded by his nephew and *natar kursya* Eliya VII (1558–91). Some compilers of patriarchal lists have inserted at this point the patriarchs 'Shem'on VIII Denha (1551–8)' and 'Eliya VI (1558–76)'. 'Shem'on VIII Denha' was part of the tangled web of deceit woven by Sulaqa's supporters in 1552. After killing off the impious Shem'on Bar Mama in 1551, they needed to explain the fact that Shem'on VII Isho'yahb was still sitting securely on his throne when Sulaqa was elected. They therefore invented 'Shem'on VIII Denha', a fictitious relative of the dead patriarch, who usurped the patriarchal throne from their own, legitimately-elected, candidate. 'Eliya VI' seems to have been conjured out of thin air, as it is quite clearly stated in Eliya VII's epitaph in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd that his reign began in 1558 and ended in 1591. Neither of these two phantom patriarchs existed.

The murdered patriarch Sulaqa was succeeded by 'Abdisho' IV Maron (1555–70), the recently-consecrated Catholic metropolitan of Gazarta. 'Abdisho' IV did not immediately seek confirmation of his election by the Vatican, but finally left for Rome in 1561, where his election was confirmed by Pope Pius IV in April 1562. Like Sulaqa before him, he asked the pope to assign him a spiritual director from the Roman Church, and Pius wrote to Nicolas Fried, the Latin bishop of Nakhichevan in Armenia, asking him to provide 'Abdisho' with a suitable adviser. 'Abdisho' was invited to attend the forthcoming session of the Council of Trent in September 1562 but excused himself, preferring to return immediately to Kurdistan. His absence was doubtless regretted by connoisseurs of the exotic, and it was left to the twentieth-century German composer Hans Pfitzner to improve upon history by giving the Chaldean patriarch a starring role at the Council of Trent in his opera *Palestrina*. 'Abdisho' arrived back in Kurdistan in 1563. It was not safe for him to reside in Amid, and he established himself in the monastery of Mar Ya'qob the Recluse near Seert, where he remained until his death in September 1570. In a letter of 1565 Pius IV informed him that he had appointed a Latin bishop as apostolic visitor for the Chaldean Church, though it is not clear whether his nominee ever joined 'Abdisho'. In the same letter the pope spoke of the difficulties facing the Catholic cause in Kurdistan. He urged 'Abdisho' to adopt the forms of the Roman Church wherever possible, particularly with respect to the sacraments, but also warned him that the Chaldeans were

deeply attached to the traditional rites of the Church of the East. So they were, and so they are still.

‘Abdisho‘ IV was succeeded by a patriarch known to the Vatican as Yahballaha, ‘an old man of holy life’. Yahballaha evidently adopted the traditional patriarchal name Shem‘on, as a patriarch of that name is mentioned in four colophons of the 1570s from the Amid and Mardin regions. He died in 1580, without seeking confirmation of his election from the Vatican. Little is known about his relations with his Nestorian counterpart Eliya VII, but the Nestorians and Chaldeans may have been distracted from their own internecine quarrels by a Muslim crackdown in the 1570s. In 1572 the Nestorian bishop Yohannan of Atel was arrested for an unknown offence and taken to Amid, where he was burned at the stake, a horrific death normally associated with the punishment of heretics in Christian countries. The place and circumstances of his execution are suggestive, but there is no evidence that the Chaldeans were implicated in his death, although many of them doubtless still resented the complicity of the Nestorians in Sulaqa’s murder seventeen years earlier and may well have wanted to take their revenge. In 1576 the Jacobite patriarch Ignatius Ni‘mat Allah was bullied into converting to Islam in Amid. Later, ashamed of his cowardice, he fled to Rome, where he was reconciled with Pope Gregory XIII in 1583. Both events were commemorated in verses composed in 1578 by the Nestorian scribe ‘Ataya of Alqosh. A touch of partisan satisfaction can surely be discerned in ‘Ataya’s poem on Ni‘mat Allah, which describes how the Jacobite patriarch ‘became a pagan at Amid, the miserable man, heedless of the Judgement Day of the Lord’. The Nestorians also had to cope with natural disasters. ‘Ataya mentioned in one of his colophons that 5,000 Muslims and 250 Christians had died in a serious outbreak of plague in Gazarta in 1578, and that he and many other citizens had been forced to leave the city and live for two months in a nearby forest, close to the monastery of Mar Yohannan the Egyptian.

Shem‘on VIII Yahballaha, as he should rightly be called, was succeeded by Shem‘on IX Denha (1580–1600), previously metropolitan of Salmas, who had been converted to Catholicism by Sulaqa’s friend the metropolitan Eliya Asmar of Amid. He was elected patriarch in the ‘monastery’ of Mar Yohannan near Salmas in 1580 by four metropolitans and five bishops, with the consent in writing of other bishops unable to attend. Peter Strozza, writing in 1617, commented that ‘neither his old age nor his religious convictions fitted him for so great a privilege’. In other words, he remained a Nestorian at heart. According to Eliya Asmar, Shem‘on IX Denha resided throughout his reign at Salmas, because the influence of the Nestorian patriarch Eliya VII (1558–91), evidently more appealing to traditionalists than his wicked uncle Shem‘on VII, made it impossible for him

Shem'on
VIII
Yahballah
1570-1580

Shem'on IX
Denha
(1580
1600)

to reside in Amid. He sent a profession of faith signed by ten metropolitans and two bishops to Rome shortly after his election. His election was confirmed by the Vatican, and a letter of confirmation was brought to Aleppo in 1584 by the papal envoy Leonard Abel, and delivered to the patriarch in Salmas in 1585 by an intermediary.

By now the Vatican had learned the truth about the circumstances of the schism that had divided the Church of the East in 1552, and was no longer quite so willing to credit the extravagant professions of loyalty of Sulaqa's successors. In the closing decades of the sixteenth century the Vatican prudently hedged its bets, keeping open a line of communication with both patriarchal lines. To distinguish the nominally-Catholic successors of Sulaqa from the Nestorian patriarchs descended from the line of Shem'on VII Isho'yahb, the Vatican gave them different titles. Sulaqa and his successors were styled 'patriarchs of the Eastern Assyrians', while the successors of Shem'on VII Isho'yahb, who claimed to be the rightful successors of the apostles Addai and Mari, were styled 'patriarchs of Babylon'. These terms, which must have bewildered their addressees, reflected the geographical knowledge of the day, and had a certain logic in the Vatican's eyes. Sulaqa hailed from a monastery that stood close to the site of Nineveh, the capital of the biblical kingdom of Assyria; while the ancestors of Shem'on VII Isho'yahb had once sat in Baghdad, wrongly believed by sixteenth-century Europeans to have been built on the site of fabled Babylon. What better than to associate the rival patriarchs with the Old Testament kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon? The Vatican no doubt meant well, but the new terminology met with a frosty reception in Mesopotamia. Nestorians and Catholics alike thought of themselves as Syrians, and were as indifferent to the new geographical labels as they had been a century earlier to the label 'Chaldean'. No sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Nestorian is known to have called himself an Assyrian, and by the end of the seventeenth century the term 'Eastern Assyrian' had fallen into disuse. The term 'patriarch of Babylon', however, had a proud future ahead of it. The Vatican continued to apply this style to the successors of Shem'on VII Isho'yahb; and in 1830, when the uniate communities were finally united under a Catholic patriarch from this line, he was recognised by the Vatican as 'patriarch of Babylon'. The title has been retained by successive Chaldean patriarchs to this day.

Eliya VII's successor Eliya VIII (1591–1617), possibly influenced by the conversion to Catholicism of numerous Nestorian pilgrims visiting Jerusalem, sent representatives to Rome in 1605 and 1610 who promised obedience to the Vatican while also defending the traditional Nestorian christological formula. Eliya also endeared himself to modern scholars by providing the Vatican with detailed reports on the condition of both Nestorian patriarchates in 1607 and 1610,

Chaldeans
vs.
Assyrian
Greek.

Nestorian line
↓
Eliya VIII
Sent Reps
to Rome
to promise
obedience
at same time
defending

CoE's christological formula.

The Martyred Church

which mention the names of their bishops and dioceses and list their surviving monasteries. As a result of these contacts he was approached by the Franciscan monk Thomas Obicini of Novara and held a synod at Amid in 1616, attended by the bishops of the western dioceses and of Salmas, which endorsed a Catholic profession of faith. In the same year the patriarch Shem'on X (1600–38), perhaps alarmed by the defection of the western bishops, sent a profession of faith to Rome. Unfortunately, it employed the traditional Nestorian formula, and had no chance of being accepted. As it was now becoming clear that the patriarchs of the Church of the East were more interested in winning papal protection than signing up to the Catholic faith, the Vatican decided to pin them down. Its wordsmiths drew up a new, watertight Catholic profession of faith, and Thomas was sent on a second mission to Kurdistan and instructed to cajole the two rival patriarchs into signing it.

Thomas arrived in Alqosh shortly after the death of Eliya VIII in May 1617. In June of the same year his successor Eliya IX Shem'on (1617–60) signed the new profession of faith with his bishops, but qualified his assent with a refusal to remove the name of Nestorius from the service-books. Thomas travelled on to Salmas with this unsatisfactory response, where he delivered a courteous letter rejecting Shem'on X's earlier profession of faith. Shem'on X received the Vatican's envoy with every appearance of enthusiasm. According to Thomas, the patriarch personally changed his bedsheets, refilled his cup and helped him to mount his horse. But this genial welcome was merely a façade. Shem'on only endorsed the new Catholic profession of faith in 1619, after a two-year delay. In an accompanying letter to the pope he promised to come to Rome in the following year to make his submission in person. He failed to keep this promise, and did not, as far as is known, correspond again with the Vatican. Some historians have claimed Shem'on X as a good Catholic on the strength of his written submission, but this seems unlikely. In fact both patriarchs, in their own different ways, had shown that, while they were prepared to be polite, they had no intention of taking orders from the pope. The Vatican's hopes had been dashed. Six decades after Sulaqa's conversion to Catholicism, its first attempt to establish a uniate line of patriarchs had fizzled out ignominiously.

The Kochanes Patriarchate, 1600–1820. Shem'on X (1600–38), the sixth patriarch of the line founded by Sulaqa in 1553, may have taken in the papal envoy Thomas of Novara with his extravagant professions of respect for the Holy See; but he demonstrated how he really felt about his relations with the Vatican by making it almost impossible for correspondence from Rome to reach him. Early in his reign he moved his patriarchal seat from Persian Salmas to the isolated upland

village of Kochanes, just across the Turkish border. Although Shemʿon made an exceptional excursion to Salmas in 1619 to meet the Vatican's envoy, who would never have found him otherwise, Eliya VIII's report of 1610 stated that he normally resided in the village of 'Cogenes'. At first sight, Shemʿon's decision to move to such an unprepossessing locale seems inexplicable. Kochanes lay in the upper reaches of the Great Zab valley and lacked all the conveniences of Salmas. The nearest towns, Julamerk and Diza Gawar, were scarcely larger than villages, and Kochanes in turn was little more than a hamlet. Ashitha, the largest Christian village in the Hakkari region, had 400 families in the middle of the nineteenth century, while poor Kochanes had only thirty-five. The village's patriarchal church of Mar Shallita, set in the shade of a grove of poplar trees, was an undistinguished building almost devoid of ecclesiastical decoration, as it was required to double as a blockhouse whenever the district was raided by the Kurds. However, the move to Kochanes had a certain logic. Salmas was too far east for Shemʿon X to be able to exercise effective control over a large part of his people. Most of the Nestorian villages in Hakkari lay along the valleys of the Great Zab and its tributaries, in the Gawar plain and in Jilu. Kochanes lay at the heart of this concentration, and was also conveniently placed for the patriarch to visit many of the other villages under his authority. The mountain path linking Van with Julamerk ran just to the west of the Kochanes valley, enabling the patriarch to stay in touch with a number of scattered Nestorian communities between Lake Van and the Great Zab.

But while the move from Salmas had internal advantages, it completed the isolation of the Shemʿons from the wider world. For the next two centuries, until their rediscovery in the 1830s by the first American missionaries to Urmia, they would govern their turbulent flock almost undisturbed by visitors from the Western Churches. Although an intrepid messenger occasionally made his way to Salmas with a letter from the Vatican, such importunities were rare. Relations with the Kurds were far more important than relations with Rome, and during these two centuries of barren introspection the patriarchs of the Shemʿon line slowly ceased to resemble their illustrious forebears. Immured in Kochanes, the successors of Timothy I gradually dwindled into mere tribal chieftains, whose chief preoccupation was feuding with the neighbouring Kurdish clans. The Shemʿons continued to consecrate metropolitans and bishops, and never quite forgot that they were Christian patriarchs; but by the end of the eighteenth century their section of the Church of the East had no monasteries, no theologians, few books and even fewer scribes and scholars. The American missionaries who spoke to the Nestorians of Hakkari and Urmia in the 1830s found them confused over basic Christian doctrines and almost completely ignorant of their Church's illustrious past.

Shem'on X's three seventeenth-century successors corresponded only fitfully with the Vatican. Shem'on XI (1638–56) sent a Catholic profession of faith to the Vatican in 1653 from the Salmas village of Khosrowa, in return receiving the pallium. His successor Shem'on XII (1656–62) sent a profession of faith to Pope Alexander VII in 1658 and signed, together with a number of his bishops, an agreement with the Vatican. He seems to have been deposed for his Catholic sympathies shortly afterwards, as Alexander VII wrote to Shah Abbas II in 1661 asking him to restore Shem'on to his throne, from which he had recently been expelled by 'schismatics'. Finally, the patriarch Shem'on XIII Denha (1662–1700) replied to an approach from the Vatican in 1670, explaining that the customs of the Church of the East were difficult to change and seeking the protection of the Roman Church on the basis of the status quo. In the light of this unsatisfactory response, it is unlikely that the Vatican took any further action at this period to win over the Kochanes patriarchs; and if there was any further correspondence between the Vatican and the Shem'on line in the seventeenth century, it has probably been lost.

During the eighteenth century the remote Kochanes patriarchate was less affected by the growing Catholic challenge than the Mosul patriarchate, whose villages were far more accessible to Catholic missionaries. Nevertheless, the few facts known about the history of the Kochanes patriarchate in the eighteenth century suggest that there were a significant number of Catholic sympathisers there also. Shem'on XIV Shlemun (1700–40) seems to have had no contact with the Vatican, and probably felt that it made little difference whether or not his patriarchate was in communion with Rome. However, the Catholic convert Khidr of Mosul promised the Mosul patriarch Eliya XII in 1734 that Shem'on's bishops would gradually come over to him if he restored the union with Rome, and he may have been right, as Catholic sympathies among the Nestorian bishops can certainly be detected during the reign of his successor Shem'on XV Mikha'il Mukhtas.

According to a list of Nestorian patriarchs compiled at Alqosh in 1883, very probably by the scribe Jeremy Shamir, Shem'on XV Mikha'il Mukhtas (1740–80) was formerly metropolitan of Jilu and was elected by four Nestorian metropolitans 'in consequence of disputes between the Catholics and the Nestorians at Alqosh, Mosul and Amid'. This reference implies that he and the group who elected him had Catholic sympathies, and Shem'on XV is indeed known to have made overtures to the Vatican during his reign. In a Vatican consistory held in June 1771, Pope Clement XIV referred to a letter recently received from the Nestorian patriarch 'Simon', expressing a desire to adopt the Catholic faith and restore the union with Rome. The pope responded to this approach with an encouraging letter in December 1772, but the correspondence does not appear to have gone further.

Shem'on XV also attempted to negotiate a military alliance with the Georgian king Heraclius II in 1769. Three letters from the patriarch to the king, written in either 1769 or 1770, have been preserved in the Georgian diplomatic annals. In 1769 the Georgians were anxious to recover territory recently lost to the Ottoman Empire, and saw the Nestorians (whom they erroneously believed to number several millions) as ideal allies in a future war of revenge against the Turks. A Georgian promise of aid was sent to Shem'on in 1769, and thereafter letters were carried between Tiflis and Kochanes by a Georgian-speaking Nestorian bishop named Isha'ya, who translated Shem'on's letters into Georgian and the king's replies into Syriac. In his letters Shem'on XV implored the Georgians to invade Kurdistan and liberate his people from the oppressive rule of the Turks, and promised to assist their invasion with 20,000 tribesmen. He claimed that the Yezidis of northern Kurdistan would also join this alliance, and demanded the fortress of Khoshab in the Taimar district as the price of his support. The more powerful Armenian Church preferred the status quo to the uncertainties of life under Georgian rule, and its leaders arrested Isha'ya and detained him for some weeks at Echmiazin during one of his journeys. Possibly because of the Armenian attitude, the promised Georgian invasion did not take place, and thereafter the disappointed Nestorians fixed their hopes of liberation on Russia, whose power in the region became increasingly evident as the eighteenth century drew to a close.

The next Nestorian patriarch, Shem'on XVI Yohannan (1780–1820), did not correspond with the Vatican. He seems to have had few contacts with the Chaldean Church, and is scarcely mentioned in the lengthy narratives that detail the reign of his Chaldean counterpart Yohannan VIII Hormizd. He died several years before the first American missionaries arrived in Urmia, and his successor Shem'on XVII Abraham (1820–61), who could have provided them with valuable information had he chosen to do so, did nothing to preserve his predecessor's memory. As a result, little is known about his forty-year reign. One of his few recorded acts, the consecration of a Nestorian metropolitan for the diocese of Salmas in 1795 to undercut the appeal of the recently-appointed Chaldean metropolitan Isho'yahb Gabriel, suggests that he possessed the conventional reflexes of a Nestorian patriarch, and shared the same assumptions as most of his predecessors since the schism of 1552.

The Mosul Patriarchate, 1617–1778. Shem'on X's move to Kochanes made contact with the Vatican and with the Catholic communities in the Amid and Mardin districts much more difficult, and in the seventeenth century his successors went back to the way things had always been done before the schism of 1552. Their resumption of the traditional Nestorian forms of worship lost them the allegiance

of the Catholics of the western districts. At the same time the successors of Shem'on VII Isho'yahb, who normally resided in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh, were exposed to strong influence from Catholic missions active in Jerusalem, Amid and Mosul, who were able to make a large number of Catholic converts among the villages of the Mosul patriarchate. This determined missionary activity laid the foundations for the triumph of Catholicism in the Mosul patriarchate two centuries later.

Although the missionary work of the Catholic Church continued without interruption in the western districts and the villages of the Mosul plain, relations between the Vatican and the Mosul patriarchate worsened with the accession of the patriarch Eliya IX Shem'on (1617–60). After asserting the traditional respect of the Church of the East for Nestorius in 1617, he defended its traditional christology to two Franciscan monks in 1629 and doubted the sincerity of many recent converts to Catholicism. During the middle years of his reign he hedged his bets, perhaps alarmed by the growing effectiveness of the Catholic missionary effort. He kept open a line of communication with the Vatican, and unlike his predecessors refrained from appointing one of his nephews *natar kursya*. This forbearance was surely intended as a sop to the Vatican, which frowned upon the uncanonical practice of hereditary succession. In 1657, two years after the accession of Pope Alexander VII, he offered to make a Catholic confession of faith in return for permission from the Vatican to build a Chaldean church in Rome and a promise that no attempts would be made to alter the doctrine and discipline of the Church of the East. This unsatisfactory offer was rebuffed by the pope, who insisted that the patriarch should formally condemn Nestorius and his teachings. Eliya did not reply to this letter, and his pointed display of independence may have been encouraged by the recent appointment of 'Abd al-Jalil, the son of a Nestorian Christian, as governor of Mosul. Although himself a Muslim convert, 'Abd al-Jalil treated the Christians of the Mosul region with consideration, and the office of governor remained in his family for more than a century and a half.

Eliya IX died in 1660, and his successor Eliya X Yohannan Marogin (1660–1700) was an energetic defender of the traditional Nestorian faith. In 1669 he made a fruitless overture to the Vatican, demanding a Chaldean chapel in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the establishment of a school for Chaldean priests in Rome. He offered nothing in return, and the fate of two earlier envoys, who had been kidnapped in the Mediterranean by Barbary corsairs and were never heard from again, probably discouraged him from despatching a further mission to Rome. Three years later he suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Catholic missionaries in Mesopotamia that ruled out any

further contacts with the Vatican. In 1672 the Catholics succeeded in converting the Nestorian metropolitan Joseph of Amid, and Eliya reacted sharply to this challenge, making a personal visit to Amid to confront his rebellious suffragan. Eliya was unable to prevent the Catholics from establishing an independent Catholic patriarchate at Amid, but continued to struggle against the Catholic threat for the rest of his reign.

Most importantly, he threw his patronage behind a remarkable outpouring of scribal activity in Alqosh and other villages in the Mosul plain during the last decades of the seventeenth century. Recognising that one of the main reasons for the success of the Catholic movement was its superior organisation, he encouraged the scribes of the Mosul region to copy service books and other liturgical texts for the use of the churches under his authority. Hitherto they had been overshadowed by their counterparts in Gazarta, but under Eliya's patronage the scribes of Mosul, Alqosh and Telkepe leapfrogged their rivals in a single generation. By the end of the seventeenth century the humble village of Alqosh, claimed by its pious inhabitants as the birthplace of the Old Testament prophet Nahum 'the Elkoshite', had become easily the most important centre of Nestorian scribal activity. The success of Eliya X's policy depended to a large extent on the commitment of the Nestorian priests in the villages of the Mosul patriarchate, and this no doubt varied considerably; but in at least one case it was remarkably effective. The Nestorian priest Joseph, son of the deacon Hormizd, of the village of Hordepneh near 'Amadiya, had sixteen manuscripts either copied or restored for the village's church of Mart Maryam between 1679 and 1716. In nearly every instance the copying was done at Alqosh.

Eliya X Yohannan Marogin died in 1700, and was succeeded by Eliya XI Marogin (1700–22), about whose personality little is known. In 1706 and 1715 he was forced to leave Alqosh and take refuge in the large Christian village of Telkepe when the Kurds of 'Amadiya raided the northern part of the Mosul plain. Despite his enforced residence in Telkepe, he was unable to prevent the growth of Catholic influence in this key village. An important battle with the Catholics was lost on his watch, when two priests and a deacon from Telkepe publicly converted to Catholicism in 1719 during the absence of the influential Nestorian priest Kanun of Telkepe on a mission to Jerusalem. The village certainly had several other Nestorian priests at this period, who must have resisted the temptation to convert, but this widely-publicised Catholic victory ultimately proved decisive. By the end of the eighteenth century most of the villagers of Telkepe were Chaldeans.

Eliya XII Denha (1722–78), the last but one Nestorian patriarch of the Mosul line, faced an even greater challenge from the activities of Catholic missionaries.

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The Catholics, now full of confidence, were energetically supported by the Chaldean patriarch Joseph III at Amid, and their missionaries received important reinforcements. An influential figure at this period was the Mosul priest Khidr, son of Hormizd, who converted to Catholicism with a number of companions in 1719 and was instrumental in winning over some of the clergy of Telkepe in the same year. Largely due to the demands of this group of converts, the Capuchins established a mission in the city of Mosul, and were joined shortly afterwards by an Italian Dominican mission. Strenuous efforts were made by Khidr and the Catholic missionaries to evangelise the Nestorian villages around Mosul. In 1729 the Catholic communities of Mosul, Telkepe, Batnaya and Alqosh petitioned the Turkish government for their own representative at Constantinople through the good offices of the Amid patriarch Joseph III. Slowly but surely, the Catholics gained ground. Although Telkepe still had around 350 Nestorian families in 1767, compared with only 150 Chaldean families, all 200 families in the neighbouring village of Batnaya were said to be Catholics. There was a decisive wave of Catholic conversions in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century there were few Nestorians left either in Mosul itself or in the villages of the Mosul plain. Telkepe, Tel Isqof, Piyoz, Batnaya and Alqosh all had overwhelming Catholic majorities, and remain Chaldean strongholds to this day. Catholic successes were not confined to the Mosul plain. Across the border in Persia, the Catholics won a striking victory in the Urmia region when the Nestorian metropolitan Isho'yahb Shem'on of Salmas (1777–89) defected to the Catholics, taking with him most of the Nestorians of Khosrowa and the other Christian villages in the Salmas plain. Only one village, Ula, remained stubbornly Nestorian.

Occasionally the Nestorians and Chaldeans of the Mosul plain were reminded that there were more important things in life than religious labels. In 1743 the Mosul region was pillaged by an invading Persian army under Nadir Shah. The Persians plundered the Mosul plain, devastating both Jacobite and Nestorian villages. Alqosh suffered the worst violence. On the approach of the Persians the village's inhabitants fled, in accordance with custom, to the monastery of Rabban Hormizd; but in a repeat of the events of 1508 the invaders stormed the monastery, killing some of the villagers and taking the others captive. The Persians then laid siege to Mosul, bombarding the city with their artillery. United by the common danger, the city's Muslims and Christians toiled to repair the damage. Eventually, unable to wear down the resistance of the defenders, the Persians raised the siege and retreated. In recognition of the courage and determination shown by the Christians during the siege, the city's Muslim governor Husain Pasha granted them permission to rebuild their damaged churches. Iwanis Karas, the Jacobite bishop of Mosul, seized

this opportunity energetically, and restored several churches in Qaraqosh and in Mosul itself. The Nestorians, by contrast, made no attempt to restore the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. Instead, it was locked up and abandoned for the next half-century. Perhaps the Nestorians were far-sighted, as the Jacobites soon had cause to regret their investment. Muslim goodwill faded. The next Ottoman governor of Mosul, Mustapha Pasha, did not consider himself bound by the assurances given by his predecessor, and in 1757 extorted money from the Christians of Mosul on the grounds that their churches had been rebuilt without his permission. This time-honoured ploy was repeated by his successor Naʿman Pasha two years later.

Eliya XII Denha realised that the growing strength of the Catholic movement in the Mosul district could not be ignored, and wrote to Pope Clement XII in 1735 expressing a desire for union. The Amid patriarch Joseph III was then in Rome, and may have persuaded the Vatican to ignore this overture. Further approaches were made by Eliya XII in 1749 and 1756, neither of which came to anything. In 1749 the patriarch delivered an unsatisfactory profession of faith, which was flatly rejected by the Vatican. In 1756, profiting from his earlier experience, Eliya contrived to appear orthodox, but the Catholic missionaries based in Mosul informed the Vatican that he was merely bowing to pressure from his own people, and that his profession of faith was not sincere. The Vatican decided to wait upon events, and in 1771 its patience appeared to be rewarded when both Eliya XII and his nephew and *natar kursya* Ishoʿyahb made acceptable professions of faith. In the following year, however, Eliya deposed Ishoʿyahb from his metropolitan rank, alarmed by his ambition, and in 1776 replaced him as *natar kursya* with another nephew, Yohannan Hormizd. Two years later Eliya was among the victims of a plague which swept through the Mosul district, and died in Alqosh in April 1778. As the monastery of Rabban Hormizd was no longer in use, he was not laid to rest alongside the other patriarchs of the Eliya line. Instead, his body was buried in the village of Alqosh.

The Amid Patriarchate, 1681–1828. In the second half of the seventeenth century both the Mosul and the Kochanes patriarchates were Nestorian, and by the 1660s the former Catholic stronghold of Amid had a Nestorian metropolitan named Joseph dependent on the Mosul patriarch Eliya X Yohannan Marogin. In 1667 the intrepid French Capuchin missionary Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Aignan founded a mission there, and before long made a substantial number of converts. In 1672 he converted Joseph himself. When he learned about Joseph's defection, Eliya X put great pressure on him to return to his allegiance. Joseph refused a summons to the patriarchal residence at Tel Isqof, fearing for his life, and Eliya made a rare excursion from the patriarchal cell to travel to Mardin and Amid, where he repossessed the Nestorian churches and removed their Catholic trappings. He

was welcomed in Amid by the governor and asserted his authority by preaching in Syriac in the church of Mar Pethion. According to Joseph's eighteenth-century biographer 'Abd al-Ahad of 'Ain Tannur, Eliya cut a rustic figure in the eyes of the sophisticated townspeople of Amid:

The word went out through all the Armenian, Greek and Syrian provinces that Mar Eliya had come from the mountain like a new apostle, to evangelise the world. But after waiting for some time in the church they heard neither psalms, nor sermon, nor prayer, nor interpretation of the Gospel; for he had never been to school, and knew neither Arabic nor Turkish. On the other hand, none could match him at smoking or drinking strong liquor.

Eliya went on to state his case before the civil authorities, smoothing the way with bribes, and as a result of his intervention Joseph was imprisoned and required to make a lengthy defence of his position before the *mutasellim* of Amid. A Muslim judge, gallantly attempting to unravel the complexities of an alien religion, established by persistent questioning that Nestorius was not (as many Muslims thought) a disciple of Jesus, but merely one of many later doctors of the Church; and that he was regarded as a heretic not only by Joseph but also by the Armenian and Syrian Catholic communities. Impressed by these revelations, and by Joseph's insistence that his beliefs conformed to those in the Gospels, the judge concluded that Joseph was not a Nestorian and released him. The *mutasellim* also came down on Joseph's side, and recognised him as an independent patriarch with jurisdiction over Amid and Mardin. A Nestorian scribe working in the Mardin village of Tabyatha mentioned Eliya's discomfiture in a contemporary manuscript note: 'In this year a bishop in Amid caused great trouble by disavowing Nestorius. Mar Eliya came here and then went to Amid, where he squandered a lot of money to no effect.' The Chaldeans of Amid rejoiced, but they soon discovered how arbitrary Turkish justice could be. A year or two later the decision was reversed by a new *mutasellim*. Joseph was again imprisoned, this time for several months.

Shortly after his second release from prison in 1675 Joseph went to Rome, hoping to drum up money to support his work in Amid. He received several messages of goodwill but little practical support, and in 1677 returned to Mesopotamia. There he was kept in funds by François Picquet, the apostolic vicar of Babylon, and with the help of the Latin missionaries finally obtained a *firman* recognising his position as an independent patriarch. The church of Mar Pethion in Amid was handed over to him, and a Nestorian bishop who had been

sent to the city by Eliya X was ordered to leave.

Although Joseph had received recognition from the Turkish civil authorities of his position, his ecclesiastical title was a matter for the Vatican. In January 1681 Pope Innocent XI directed that Joseph should be recognised as *de facto* patriarch of the Chaldeans. There were important strings attached to this recognition. The Vatican's ultimate aim was to win back the allegiance of the Mosul 'patriarchs of Babylon', and it saw trouble ahead if, when this glorious day arrived, there were two separate, equally legitimate, Chaldean patriarchates. Joseph was therefore styled not 'patriarch of Amid' but 'patriarch of the Chaldean nation deprived of its patriarch'. The implications of this tortuous title were clear, at least to the Vatican. The Amid patriarchate was merely a means to an end, and would be suppressed once it had served its purpose. Joseph returned to Amid and carried out his patriarchal duties until 1693 when, old and in ill health, he retired to Rome, where he died in 1707.

He was succeeded by his disciple Sliba Mar'uf of Telkepe, who was confirmed by the Vatican in 1696 under the name Joseph II. Joseph II (1696–1713) also had to face severe opposition from the Nestorians, but worked hard to maintain the Catholic faith in his patriarchate. In 1708 a serious plague broke out in Amid and persisted for several years. The Chaldean patriarch, like his sixth-century Nestorian namesake, worked tirelessly to bring relief to the victims of the plague. Exposing himself fearlessly to its contagion, he eventually succumbed himself. He died in Amid in 1713, shortly after receiving permission to retire to Rome. His successor Timothy Marogin was confirmed by the Vatican in 1714, also taking the name Joseph. Although his two predecessors had found it difficult simply to preserve the status quo in Amid and Mardin, Joseph III (1713–57) presided over a period of significant success for the Catholic cause, not only in the western districts but also in the territories of the Mosul patriarchate. Joseph himself set an excellent example, but at the local level the Catholic achievement was due to the enthusiasm of Latin missionaries working in Mosul and among the villages of the Mosul plain. The success of the Catholic missionaries, though not without setbacks, so shook the confidence of the patriarch Eliya XII Denha (1722–78) that neither of his two immediate successors, Eliya XIII Isho'yahb and Yohannan VIII Hormizd, could have become patriarch without professing the Catholic faith.

Joseph III visited Mosul on two occasions, in 1723 and in 1728, and is said to have converted 3,000 Nestorians with his powerful speeches. His second visit required him to bribe no fewer than five separate Turkish officials to gain the necessary permits and permissions, and he also had to hire a Turkish military escort to protect him from the violence of the heretics. The Nestorian patriarch Eliya XII Denha reacted vigorously to these incursions, persecuting the Catholics

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of Amid and Mosul and using his influence with the civil authorities to have the Chaldean patriarch imprisoned several times. Eventually the Turkish authorities intervened, assigning Mosul and Aleppo to the Nestorians and Amid and Mardin to the Catholics. During this time of trouble Joseph twice begged the Vatican for permission to retire to Rome, in 1724 and 1726, but on both occasions his resignation was refused. He was finally released from prison in 1731, and left Amid for Rome shortly afterwards, hoping to recover the money he had used to bribe the civil authorities. Before his departure he consecrated two bishops, Basil Hesro for Mardin and Shem'on Kemo for Seert, a diocese hitherto loyal to the Eliya line. During the next four years he visited several Catholic courts in Poland and Italy, where he pleaded for funds for his Church. Thanks to a letter of recommendation from the Vatican he was able to raise a modest amount of money from the ruling families in Florence, Venice and Vienna, but it was far less than he had hoped for. In 1735 he returned to Rome, where he remained until 1741. During his absence the Nestorians recovered several villages in the Seert district and the metropolitan Basil Hesro of Mardin died at the end of 1738. In 1739 the patriarchal administrator Shem'on Kemo wrote several letters to Joseph, begging him to return, and in 1741 Joseph finally returned to Amid, where he resumed his patriarchal duties for a further sixteen years. His patriarchate ended disastrously when he alienated his flock in an ill-judged attempt to designate his successor. In November 1754, without any prior consultation, he consecrated one of his favourites, a 23-year-old priest named Anton Gallo, as his coadjutor. The Chaldeans protested vigorously to the Vatican, and Gallo's consecration was nullified in May 1756. Feelings continued to run high, however. In January 1757, both the patriarch and his young favourite died suddenly in Amid, within twelve days of one another. Since Gallo was only in his twenties, the circumstances were highly suspicious, and it is quite possible that Joseph III was murdered by his resentful flock, along with his presumptive heir.

The Chaldean dioceses of Amid and Seert were both vacant at this period, and Joseph's sudden death left the Chaldean Church with only one bishop, a 95-year-old metropolitan of Mardin. The Chaldeans hastily chose a new patriarch, a priest named La'zar Hindi who had been educated at the College of the Propaganda. Hindi, who was consecrated in February 1757 and confirmed by the Vatican in March 1759, took the title Joseph IV. Like his three predecessors he was kept continually short of funds, as the Turkish authorities were adept at extorting money from his congregations on specious pretexts. In 1761 Joseph IV left for Rome to try to mend his fortunes. In 1767, partly in response to Joseph's pleas, the Vatican printed thousands of Gospel lectionaries and missals for the use of the Chaldean faithful in Mesopotamia; but it was less forthcoming with hard

cash. During the 1770s Joseph spent several years travelling in Europe attempting to raise funds, but his efforts met with no more success than those of Joseph III before him. Discouraged, he resigned in 1780, but was persuaded to accept the interim appointment of patriarchal administrator. After a brief period of imprisonment in 1789 he was summoned to Rome in 1791, where he remained until his death in 1796.

Joseph IV was succeeded as patriarchal administrator in 1802 by his nephew Augustine Hindi. Unlike his four predecessors, Augustine was not given the title of patriarch because the Vatican was hoping to unite the Mosul and Amid patriarchates under the leadership of Eliya XII Denha's nephew Yohannan Hormizd, who had converted to Catholicism. Since 1780 Yohannan Hormizd had been governing the Mosul patriarchate, with the Vatican's approval, as patriarchal administrator, in opposition to his Nestorian cousin Eliya XIII Isho'yahb, and the Vatican planned eventually to recognise him as patriarch. Unfortunately, Yohannan Hormizd was completely unfit for his office. His relations with the Vatican lurched from one crisis to another, and in 1812 he was suspended from his duties for several years. During his suspension Augustine Hindi was appointed apostolic delegate for the Mosul patriarchate and until his death in April 1827 effectively governed both patriarchates. In 1818 his service was rewarded with the pallium, which he chose to interpret as a recognition of his patriarchal status, and for the rest of his life he used the title 'Joseph V'. In 1828 the Amid patriarchate, which had existed independently for 146 years, was formally suppressed by the Vatican.

The Union of the Mosul and Amid Patriarchates, 1778–1830. With the defection of the Catholics of Amid and Mardin in the 1670s, the Mosul patriarchate lost much of its influence in the western districts, but because it retained the prestigious monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh and its patriarchs were descended from the old patriarchal line, it had a legitimacy in the eyes of many East Syrians that the newly-created Amid patriarchate could never have. So long as the patriarchs of the Eliya line remained Nestorian, the Vatican naturally supported the Amid patriarchs as defenders of its Catholic bridgehead in the Church of the East, but the Amid patriarchate was always regarded by the Vatican as a means to an end. This end, to which the Vatican devoted considerable time and effort in the eighteenth century, was the conversion of a patriarch of the Eliya line. It was finally achieved early in the nineteenth century, in the person of the patriarch Yohannan VIII Hormizd (1830–8), after a bitter power struggle which reflected little credit on any of the parties involved.

On the day after the death of Eliya XII his nephews Isho'yahb and Yohannan

both made Catholic professions of faith, and were reconciled. Despite the late patriarch's preference the Catholic missionaries supported Isho'yahb, who shortly afterwards succeeded his uncle as patriarch without opposition from the young Yohannan. Once Isho'yahb obtained his *firman*, he abandoned his Catholic profession in May 1779, and the notables of Mosul, with the support of the missionaries, deposed him and unanimously chose Shem'on of Amid, the Chaldean bishop of Mardin, as patriarch in his place. Shem'on declined to accept this honour, and Isho'yahb's opponents were obliged to turn instead to the young Yohannan Hormizd, who had recently demonstrated his zeal for the Catholic cause by winning over the Nestorians of 'Ainqawa, Armuta and Shaqlawa, three important villages in the Erbil district. He was elected patriarch in 1780, and his supporters bribed the governor of Mosul to use his influence to obtain a *firman* from Constantinople, granting him authority over both the Chaldean Christians and the Nestorians. He then sent a profession of faith and a letter of submission to the Vatican.

The Vatican was placed in a dilemma by this turn of events. Yohannan Hormizd's election had been irregular and tainted with bribery, but if his conversion to Catholicism was genuine he might be the Catholic patriarch of Babylon it had long hoped for, offering the prospect of the conversion of the entire patriarchate. Its initial response was to inform Raphael Terconuski, the superior of the Catholic mission at Mosul, that Yohannan Hormizd's profession of faith was satisfactory, but that his election was to be considered null. On 18 February 1783, having considered further, the Sacred Congregation decided to appoint him archbishop of Mosul and patriarchal administrator of the Mosul patriarchate. In consideration of the feelings of the Chaldeans of the Amid patriarchate, however, it stopped short of awarding him the title of patriarch.

For the next eight years Yohannan Hormizd seemed to justify the hopes placed in him. He lived on amicable terms with the Catholic missionaries and supported their efforts to win souls among the Nestorians. In 1790 the Nestorian villages of Arena and Barzane in the 'Aqra district accepted Catholicism, and in 1791 the large village of Mengeshe in the Sapna district followed suit. In the same year the Vatican appointed Yohannan Hormizd patriarchal administrator of the Amid patriarchate, recalling La'zar Hindi to Rome to leave him a free hand. This appointment evoked strenuous protests from Hindi and the Catholic clergy of Amid, and in February 1793 the appointment was rescinded. At about the same time Yohannan's behaviour began to arouse concern among the Mosul missionaries and in the Vatican. He flouted the normal church customs on several occasions, forcing the missionaries to conclude that he was at best imprudent and at worst actively corrupt. Yohannan retorted by accusing the

missionaries of arrogance and mischief-making, and on his request the apostolic vicar of Baghdad, Fulgence de Sainte Marie, was sent to Mosul in 1796 to report on the situation.

Between 1796 and 1801 Yohannan Hormizd worked hard to make a good impression on Fulgence de Sainte Marie, and a general consistory held in the Vatican in September 1801 even considered the possibility of appointing him patriarch of Babylon. His credit was almost immediately undermined by renewed complaints from a section of the Chaldean Church. His opponents, supported on this occasion by the Latin missionaries, impugned his orthodoxy and accused him of embezzling monastic property. In 1802 the Chaldeans wrote to Rome demanding the dismissal of both Yohannan and his nephew the metropolitan Shem'on of 'Amadiya. The letters do not seem to have produced any immediate effect, but doubtless added to the concern in the Vatican about Yohannan's reliability. Yohannan's precarious relations with the Vatican sank further in 1803. In 1798, in response to an appeal from the Malabar Christians of India, Yohannan had sent them a Chaldean bishop, Paul Pandari. He had first sought guidance from the Vatican, but because Rome was then under French occupation he had received no reply. In 1803, after the Vatican was informed of Pandari's arrival in India, Yohannan was asked to account for his actions. Although the Vatican accepted his explanation, it did so reluctantly.

While his relations with the Vatican were cooling, Yohannan Hormizd had also to deal with the opposition of his cousin Isho'yahb, who continued to assert his own claim to the patriarchate. Although most of the villages of the Mosul plain now had Catholic majorities, Catholic missionaries had not yet ventured into the hilly 'Amadiya and 'Aqra districts beyond Alqosh, and had made relatively few converts among the villagers of the Tigris plain between Dohuk and Zakho. Most of the Christians in these districts were still Nestorians, and preferred a Nestorian to a Catholic patriarch. In 1780, after failing to persuade the Catholic missionaries to set aside Yohannan's succession, Isho'yahb dropped his Catholic pretensions, withdrew to 'Amadiya, and set about consolidating the loyalty of this constituency. He took the patriarchal title Eliya XIII Isho'yahb, presenting himself as the legitimate successor of Eliya XII Denha, and consecrated his nephew Hnanisho' metropolitan in 1784 in order to preserve the patriarchate within his family. Several bishops recognised his authority, and the Mosul patriarchate was racked by schism for the next two decades. The Nestorians of the 'Amadiya, 'Aqra, Zakho and Dohuk districts rallied to Isho'yahb, while the Catholics of the Mosul plain closed ranks behind Yohannan Hormizd. The local Ottoman authorities, who rarely missed a chance of making money out of the infidels, also took sides. Eliya XIII Isho'yahb purchased the backing of the governor of 'Amadiya, while Yohannan

Hormizd bought the support of the governor of Mosul. Henceforth, Yohannan Hormizd and his supporters were not welcome in the domains of the governor of ʿAmadiya. In 1788 Yohannan's nephew was arrested on a visit to the Nestorian village of Bir Sivi near Zakho, and was only released after the intervention of the governor of Baghdad. In 1792 Yohannan and his two brothers went to ʿAmadiya on business, and were arrested, flogged and imprisoned for three and a half months. Again, the governor of Baghdad had to intervene in order to secure their release. The enmity between the two cousins was only ended by the death of Eliya XIII Ishoʿyahb in 1804. He died, as he had lived, as a Nestorian patriarch. In accordance with his instructions, his body was laid to rest in the abandoned monastery of Rabban Hormizd, alongside the remains of his illustrious predecessors. Eliya XIII Ishoʿyahb was the ninth and last Nestorian patriarch to be buried in the monastery, and his marble tomb, like those of his eight predecessors, is adorned with a fine Nestorian profession of faith. His burial was a final, self-conscious gesture towards a tradition that stretched back to 1497. His mourners probably suspected that the future lay with the Catholics.

The death of Eliya XIII Ishoʿyahb did not end Yohannan Hormizd's troubles. In 1808 he faced another challenge to his authority from a Baghdad merchant named Gabriel Dambo, one of the most remarkable figures of the nineteenth century Chaldean Church. A Chaldean Christian born in Mardin, Dambo had made sufficient money by middle age to be able to retire from business, and he decided to devote the rest of his life to the service of the Church. The once-thriving monastery of Rabban Hormizd had been abandoned for many years, and he dreamed of reviving its monastic life and restoring it to its former glory. He paved the way by giving free lessons in Baghdad to young Chaldean Christians in Arabic, grammar, logic and rhetoric, and after winning a formidable reputation as a teacher and scholar moved to Mosul. In 1808 he had no difficulty in persuading the Chaldean authorities and their Catholic missionary advisers to allow him to establish a seminary in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd.

At first Dambo had only two companions, and was obliged to rely for practical support on sympathisers in the village of Alqosh. But before long he collected a number of pupils, and was appointed the lay superior of the seminary. By the end of the 1820s the monastery had just under a hundred monks. An energetic and charismatic visionary, Gabriel had his own ideas of how things should be done, and had little patience with the leaders of the Chaldean Church. If the new seminary was to succeed it needed its own income, and Gabriel insisted, probably correctly, that a large proportion of the property then in the hands of the patriarchal family was originally owned by the monastery of Rabban Hormizd and should rightly revert to it. Yohannan Hormizd, understandably, did not agree. This

single issue would have been sufficient to poison relations between the two men, but there were other causes of friction as well. The new seminary had attracted men who disliked Yohannan Hormizd and wanted more vigorous leadership. The monks rallied around their superior and made no secret of their distaste for the patriarchal administrator. They were joined by the Catholic missionaries, who shared their admiration for Gabriel, and by a number of influential priests. In 1809 the Vatican considered suspending Yohannan Hormizd, and rumours that he had indeed been suspended were circulated by his opponents, eliciting a spirited letter of protest by his supporters in October 1811.

The Vatican disavowed an attempt by Yohannan Hormizd's opponents to oust him in 1811 by consecrating another Catholic bishop for Mosul, but matters finally came to a head in 1812, after Gabriel Dambo's monks, abetted by the Catholic missionaries, drew up a formidable indictment against the patriarchal administrator and presented it to the Vatican. Yohannan Hormizd was accused of inciting the Kurds of ʿAmadiya against the defenceless Chaldeans of the Mosul plain, encouraging his Catholic converts to return to Nestorianism, and making life impossible for the monks of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. The first two charges were absurd, but there was some truth in the third. The effect of these exaggerated accusations was all that the conspirators could have hoped for. There was alarm at Rome, and in February 1812 the Vatican suspended Yohannan from his functions as archbishop of Mosul and patriarchal administrator, and named Augustine Hindi 'apostolic delegate for the affairs of the patriarchate of Babylon'. While this decision temporarily placed the two Catholic patriarchates under a single trustworthy authority, it was an unsatisfactory solution from the Vatican's point of view, as Hindi could never command the same prestige in the Mosul district as a member of the old patriarchal family.

Yohannan Hormizd's suspension lasted for six years. At first he refused to accept his position, and issued threats against his opponents. Eventually he decided to seek a reconciliation with them, and a meeting was held in February 1818 at Alqosh, attended by a hundred priests, deacons and notables, in which he agreed to apologise in writing for his misdeeds. The assembly decided to send a letter to the Vatican to ask for his suspension to be lifted. Unfortunately, these good intentions were frustrated, as the courier was murdered during his journey and the letter never reached its destination. The Vatican, ignorant of the temporary rapprochement between the patriarchal administrator and his opponents, extended Yohannan Hormizd's suspension in May 1818.

Once again, Yohannan Hormizd refused to accept the validity of the sentence, and continued to assert his privileges wherever he could, abetted by the civil authorities at ʿAmadiya. The apostolic delegate Augustine Hindi declined

to enter the arena in person, relying on Gabriel Dambo's monks to bring down his opponent. In March 1822 Hindi consecrated five metropolitans at Amid, all of them monks of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd and all of them prominent opponents of Yohannan Hormizd. Three of the newly-consecrated metropolitans, led by the future patriarch Joseph VI Audo, returned to their home villages in the Mosul plain instead of proceeding to their dioceses, and began to ordain their own priests and deacons to replace Yohannan Hormizd's creatures. Before long, the large Chaldean villages of Alqosh, Telkepe and Tel Isqof were riven with faction. On one side were the 'Hannafites', supporters of Yohannan Hormizd, and on the other the 'Yusefites', supporters of Joseph Audo. In Alqosh, Joseph Audo's party worshipped in the 'upper church' of Mar Mikha, while Yohannan Hormizd's clique prayed in the 'lower church' of Mar Giwargis.

The feud between Yohannan Hormizd and Joseph Audo lasted for six years, from 1822 to 1828. Its unedifying details have been preserved in a long account written shortly after Gabriel Dambo's death by one of the Rabban Hormizd monks, very probably Elisha^c of Dohuk, who was appointed superior-general of the Chaldean monasteries in 1859. Ostensibly a biography of the monastery's charismatic superior, most of the narrative is devoted to the clashes of the 1820s. Some of the battles were won by Yohannan Hormizd, others by Joseph Audo. Both sides claimed the moral high ground, and both sides used unscrupulous methods that mocked their lofty pretensions. Although most of the Rabban Hormizd monks rallied behind Joseph Audo, not all did. In 1827, during Gabriel Dambo's temporary absence in Rome, a revolt by a number of Rabban Hormizd monks in favour of Yohannan Hormizd split the Yusefites and enabled Yohannan Hormizd to expel the troublesome metropolitan Basil Asmar from Telkepe, forcing him to take refuge in Amid. Shortly afterwards the Yusefites regained their ground. Joseph Audo was consecrated metropolitan of 'Amadiya in 1828, and by the adroit use of bribery was able to persuade the civil authorities to imprison Yohannan Hormizd for four months.

So far, the Vatican had not intervened directly in this dreary dispute, but matters were brought to a head in April 1827 with the death of Augustine Hindi at Amid. Hindi's death required an urgent decision to be made about the future of the Amid patriarchate. For a century and a half the Vatican had sustained it only as a stop-gap, pending the conversion of a patriarch of the Eliya line. Yohannan Hormizd, despite his many faults, was a good Catholic, or at least could be presented as one. Hindi's death gave the Vatican its long-awaited opportunity to merge the Chaldean dioceses into a single patriarchate of Babylon, under the leadership of Yohannan Hormizd. Basil Asmar succeeded Hindi as metropolitan

of Amid later in 1828, but was not accorded the title either of patriarch or of apostolic administrator. Amid reverted to its former status as an archdiocese, and the Amid patriarchate was finally suppressed.

The Vatican now had to end the feud between Yohannan Hormizd and his opponents. Tempers were still running high, and although the cardinals had to pick their way carefully through the maze of accusations and counter-accusations, their main course was clear: to sustain Yohannan Hormizd and to disarm his opponents, gently if possible but if necessary with a firm hand. The apostolic vicar Pierre-Alexander Coupperie travelled to Mosul, made a show of investigating both sides' complaints, prepared a judicious report absolving Yohannan of blame, and lifted his suspension. Gabriel Dambo was then in Rome, to lobby more effectively against his rival, and declared that he would not accept Coupperie's decision unless it were personally endorsed by Pope Leo XII. Coupperie thereupon persuaded a number of influential Chaldeans to join him in a written appeal to the Vatican for Yohannan's reinstatement. Coupperie died shortly afterwards, and was succeeded as apostolic vicar by his assistant Laurent Trioche. Like his predecessor, Trioche supported the patriarchal administrator, and his stance eventually proved decisive. In July 1830 the Vatican appointed the 74-year-old Yohannan Hormizd patriarch of the Chaldeans.

In this tortuous manner, fifty years after his irregular succession to the Nestorian patriarch Eliya XII Denha, the Catholic archbishop Yohannan Hormizd was finally recognised as patriarch of Babylon. The suppression of the Amid patriarchate in 1828 and the subsequent union of the Chaldean dioceses under Yohannan Hormizd's leadership in 1830 marked the birth of the modern Chaldean Church.

Developments in India. The competition between the Nestorians and Chaldeans in Mesopotamia also spilled over to the Malabar Church of India, the last relic of the once-extensive exterior provinces of the Church of the East. By the second half of the sixteenth century the cordial relations between the Malabar Christians and the Portuguese had cooled considerably. The Portuguese were determined to bring the Malabar Christians into the Catholic Church, and they had little time for bishops sent out to the Indian Christians by the Church of the East, whether Nestorian or Chaldean. In 1555 the newly-consecrated Catholic patriarch 'Abdisho' IV despatched the Chaldean bishops Eliya Asmar and Joseph Sulaqa to India, accompanied by the Dominican adviser Ambrose Buttigeg, who had been assigned by Pope Julius III in 1553 as a counsellor to Yohannan Sulaqa. Joseph was consecrated metropolitan of India by Eliya Asmar when he reached the Malabar Coast, and for the next few years struggled to persuade the Portuguese of his

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orthodoxy. After being detained by the Portuguese at Bassein for several months Joseph was arrested in 1558 when he attempted to proceed to his diocese. He was sent, via Mozambique, to Lisbon, where he was questioned by the Inquisition. He eventually convinced his interrogators of his orthodoxy, and in 1564 was allowed to go back to India. Meanwhile, Eliya Asmar had returned to Mesopotamia with the news of Joseph's arrest. 'Abdisho' IV responded by sending a third Chaldean bishop, Abraham, to India in 1559. On his arrival Abraham discovered that he had to contend not only with the Portuguese but also with a Nestorian bishop named Shem'on, who had been sent to India the previous year by the Mosul patriarch Eliya VII. Abraham immediately denounced the Nestorian bishop to the Portuguese authorities, and Shem'on was arrested and deported to Rome, where he was degraded from his episcopal rank on the orders of Pope Sixtus V. He was then sent to Portugal, where he died in Lisbon under house arrest several years later. Abraham went on to establish reasonable relations with the Portuguese, and was accepted by them as metropolitan of the Saint Thomas Christians. The only hitch came when Joseph Sulaqa finally returned to India in 1565. He found Abraham occupying his own throne and furiously demanded his resignation, appealing to the Portuguese to enforce his legitimate rights. The Portuguese deported both Syrian bishops. Joseph Sulaqa died in 1569, en route to Rome, while Abraham escaped from Portuguese custody in Mozambique, fled back to Mosul and then made a perilous journey to Rome, where he managed to convince Pope Sixtus V that he was a good Catholic. In 1568 he returned to India with the Vatican's blessing, and governed the Saint Thomas Christians as Chaldean metropolitan of Angamale for two decades until his death in 1597. A Syriac manuscript in the Vatican collection copied in Kothamangalam in 1584, 'in the time of the patriarch Mar Shem'on', attests to the loyalty of at least some Saint Thomas Christians at this period to Shem'on IX Denha, the fourth representative of the line of uniate patriarchs founded by Sulaqa in 1553. After Abraham's death neither the Nestorians nor the Chaldeans had a bishop in India, and this circumstance gave the Portuguese their opportunity to impose their own ecclesiastical rule on the Saint Thomas Christians.

The fate of the Syrian Christians of the Malabar Coast was sealed in 1597, the year of Abraham's death, with the arrival in Goa of the archbishop Aleixo de Menezes, a young, vigorous, capable, devout and single-minded son of the Church of Rome. Menezes was determined that all Christians in India must come under his jurisdiction and accept the definitions of the Council of Trent. In 1598 the newly-arrived archbishop ordained more than 100 Indian priests. In June 1599 he summoned 660 lay representatives of the Saint Thomas Christians and 153 priests to a synod at Diamper (Udayamperur), in which he briskly and efficiently destroyed the Syriac heritage of the Indian Christians and brought the

Malabar Church into line with the latest Catholic dogmas. The Saint Thomas Christians were required to recognise the decisions of the Council of Ephesus and the condemnation of Diodorus, Theodore and Nestorius. Priestly celibacy was introduced, requiring some Indian priests to divorce their wives if they wished to keep their jobs. The Syriac liturgy was heavily amended to incorporate language that honoured Mary as Mother of God. Angamale ceased to be the seat of a Syrian metropolitan and became instead a suffragan diocese of the Catholic archdiocese of Goa. Worst of all, in the eyes of some modern scholars, many of the Syriac manuscripts of the Saint Thomas Christians were confiscated and burned for their heretical tendencies. MS Trichur Syriac 64, the earliest surviving manuscript of the *Nomocanon* of ‘Abdisho’ of Nisibis, copied before the end of the thirteenth century, must have come into the possession of the Indian Church after the synod of Diamper. Otherwise it too would probably have been consigned to the flames, along with other treasures whose value can now only be guessed at. Opposition to this *diktat* was simply voted down by Menezes and his freshly-minted priests. At the synod of Diamper, a Christian tradition that had endured for more than a millennium was eviscerated in a single week. Thanks to Menezes, the early history of the Saint Thomas Christians can no longer be recovered.

The Portuguese probably also contributed to the extinction of Nestorian Christianity in Hormuz and Soqatra a few decades later. Marco Polo did not notice any Christians in Hormuz in the late thirteenth century, suggesting that their numbers were already small by then. Nevertheless, a Nestorian community survived at Hormuz into the seventeenth century. In 1616 the Mosul patriarch Eliya VIII complained to Pope Paul VI that the Portuguese were harassing the ‘Chaldeans’ of Hormuz, Goa and the further parts of India, and it is unlikely that the Nestorians of Hormuz long survived this harassment. Christianity in Soqatra also died out around the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Portuguese friar Antonio de Gouvea, who travelled extensively in Persia and around the Persian Gulf between 1602 and 1613, wrote of its extinction as a recent phenomenon.

The Saint Thomas Christians remained within the fold of the Catholic Church for the next six decades, but during this period they grew increasingly restive. They chafed under the administration of the Jesuit bishop Francis Roz (1600–24), who showed some sensitivity to their age-old traditions, and actively opposed his successors Stephen Britto (1624–41) and Francis Garzia (1641–59), who did not. Under Garzia’s episcopate they began to complain that the few privileges and exemptions granted them at the synod of Diamper were being infringed. In 1650 they secretly wrote to the Mosul patriarch Eliya IX Shem’on and his Kochanes counterpart Shem’on XI, and also to the Jacobite patriarch in Antioch

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and the Coptic patriarch in Alexandria, asking for a Syrian bishop to be sent to them. Two years later a Syrian bishop, Cyril Ahatallah, duly arrived. Originally a Jacobite bishop of Damascus, Ahatallah had converted to Catholicism in 1632 and had consequently been drummed out of the Syrian Orthodox Church. In 1650 he was living in Cairo, at something of a loose end, and was told that the Indian Christians had asked the Coptic patriarch to send them a bishop. Seizing his opportunity, he persuaded Eliya IX Shem'on to consecrate him metropolitan of India and China (his Catholicism apparently being no bar to this appointment) and sailed to India to seek his fortune. On his arrival in Meliapur in 1652 he was promptly arrested by the Portuguese as a schismatic and deported to Lisbon to be questioned by the Inquisition. He seems to have died in Paris in 1659 while being taken to Rome for further questioning.

The Saint Thomas Christians, however, firmly believed that he had been either drowned in Cochin harbour or burnt at the stake as a heretic at Goa, and the incident brought to a head the resentment they harboured towards their Portuguese masters. In 1653 they rebelled against the Portuguese. The rebels gathered in the churchyard at Mattancheri and swore an oath on its ancient 'Koonen cross' to expel the Jesuits and to follow the leadership of their archdeacon until they were given a bishop from the Church of the East. When the news of the rebellion reached Rome, Pope Alexander VII sent the Syrian bishop Sebastiani at the head of a Carmelite delegation to Malabar in 1661. The Catholic missionaries worked hard, showing rather more sensitivity to the traditions of the Syrians than they had in the past, and by 1662 most of the Saint Thomas Christians (84 of 116 parishes) had returned to the Catholic fold. Shortly before the end of the nineteenth century the descendants of the Catholics who had rallied to Sebastiani were organised into a new eastern rite uniate Church, the Syro-Malabar Church, which presently numbers just under 4 million members and is the largest of the dozen or so modern Churches that have divided the Indian inheritance of the Church of the East. This Church, sometimes loosely described as the 'Chaldean Church of India', is in communion with the modern Chaldean Church but has no formal connection with it. Several communities seceded from the Syro-Malabar Church in 1907 and established a traditional Nestorian Church at Trichur (confusingly styled the Syro-Chaldean or Chaldean Syrian Church), but with that single exception the Syro-Malabar Church has maintained its integrity for most of its existence.

But thirty-two parishes resisted the blandishments of the Catholic missionaries, and in 1665 the Jacobites began fishing in these troubled waters. A Jacobite bishop named Gregory arrived in India, and the remaining rebels were so pleased to see a bishop from one of the Syrian Churches that they accepted him

unreservedly. Abandoning the traditions that their forefathers had maintained for more than a millennium, they insouciantly subscribed to the miaphysite doctrine of the Syrian Orthodox Church. The Nestorian patriarch Timothy I must have turned in his grave. Their submission marked the birth of the Jacobite Malankara Church, named after the spot where Saint Thomas was said to have first set foot in India. For the past three and a half centuries its bishops and priests have stoutly maintained on Indian soil the verities of Philoxenus of Mabbugh against the pernicious doctrines of Nestorius. The Malankara Church has been no more exempt than its Catholic counterpart from the centrifugal tendencies of the Syriac-speaking Churches, and has now fragmented into five separate Churches, three of them Syrian Orthodox, the fourth reformed Syrian Orthodox, and the fifth Syrian Catholic. Between them, these five Churches now account for around 4.3 million Syrian Orthodox Christians and 150,000 Syrian Catholics.

Since 1665 most of the Syrian communities along the Malabar Coast of India have belonged either to the Syro-Malabar or Malankara traditions. The subsequent history of these two Churches and their various offshoots, whose complexity has deterred all but the most indefatigable of scholars, is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, sporadic attempts were made from time to time to restore the traditional ties between the Saint Thomas Christians and the Church of the East. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the Mosul patriarchs attempted to reassert their control over the Syrian Christians of India. The metropolitan Gabriel of the Urmia diocese of Ardishai was sent to India in 1704 by the patriarch Eliya XI Marogin. Doubtless appreciating the difficulties he was likely to encounter as a suspected Nestorian, Gabriel took the precaution before starting out on his journey of making a Catholic profession of faith before the Chaldean patriarch Joseph II at Amid. On his arrival in India he was obliged to make a further profession of faith and to swear a solemn pledge of allegiance to the Portuguese ecclesiastical authorities. Brushing aside these undertakings, Gabriel proceeded to offer a lively opposition to the Jacobite metropolitan Thomas IV. He had remarkable success. While the Jacobites were certainly preferable to European bishops, Gabriel was more attractive still. He came from the Nestorian heartland in Kurdistan, with the authority of the catholicus Eliya, and offered the promise of restoring the traditional ties of the Malabar Church with the Church of the East. Forty-two communities came over to him, leaving the Malankara metropolitan with only twenty-five. Thomas appealed to the Jacobite patriarch at Antioch for help against this dangerous interloper, but without success. Only after Gabriel's death in 1739 were the Jacobites able to recover their hold on the Malankara Church.

Many Indian Christians continued to cherish their traditional links with the Church of the East, and at the end of the eighteenth century an incident

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occurred which brought the Chaldean Church into conflict with the Vatican on the principle of jurisdiction. In 1796 an Indian delegation led by the Catholic priest Paul Pandari travelled to Baghdad to ask the Chaldean patriarch Joseph IV to appoint a bishop for the Malabar Christians. Joseph IV had recently died, and the Indian delegation was passed on to the patriarchal administrator Yohannan Hormizd. He wrote to Rome more than once seeking advice, but as the city was then under French occupation he received no reply. In February 1798 Yohannan made Pandari a bishop. He was careful not to consecrate him for any of the existing Indian dioceses, and he also gave him a title that would resonate with the Jacobites of the Malankara Church. Pandari was styled 'bishop of Mar Behnam', after the famous Jacobite monastery a few miles southeast of Mosul. Yohannan also appointed the Chaldean bishop Isho'yahb Gabriel of Salmas vicar for the Catholic Christians of the Syro-Malabar Church. Pandari and his companions returned to India shortly afterwards and provoked a schism in the Malankara Church. Some communities accepted them, while others remained loyal to the Jacobite authorities. In 1803, after the Vatican had gathered all the facts of the affair, it upheld the validity of Pandari's consecration and recognised the position given to the metropolitan Isho'yahb Gabriel of Salmas. This decision postponed for another generation the decisive clash of wills between the Vatican and the Chaldean Church over jurisdiction in India, but it had little effect on the situation in India itself. Pandari's position remained uncomfortable until his death several years later.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

The Patriarchal Succession. Paradoxically, less is known about the careers of some of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Nestorian patriarchs than of their counterparts a millennium earlier, whose reigns were chronicled by Mari, 'Amr and Sliba. Even the reign dates of some of the Kochanes patriarchs are not known with any degree of confidence, and the few known facts are summarised here. The patriarchal succession after the schism of 1552 is certain in the case of the Mosul patriarchate, because up to the beginning of the nineteenth century nearly all of its patriarchs were buried in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, and their epitaphs, which give the date of their deaths, have survived. Shem'on VII's successor Eliya VII died on 26 May 1591, after having been metropolitan of Mosul for 15 years and patriarch for 32 years; Eliya VIII on 26 May 1617; Eliya IX on 18 June 1660; Eliya X Yohannan Marogin on 17 May 1700; Eliya XI Marogin on 14 December 1722; and Eliya XIII Isho'yahb in 1804. Eliya XII

Denha died of plague in Alqosh on 29 April 1778, and was exceptionally buried in the town rather than the monastery, which had been temporarily abandoned after the Persian invasion of 1743.

The information available on Sulaqa and his successors is much less exact. The date of Sulaqa's election in 1552 is not known, but he was confirmed as 'patriarch of Mosul' by the Vatican on 28 April 1553, and was martyred at the beginning of 1555, probably on 12 January. The date of 'Abdisho' IV's succession in 1555 is not known, but he died on 11 September 1570. The dates of Shem'on VIII Yahballaha's accession and death (presumably in 1570 and 1580 respectively) are not known. Shem'on IX Denha was elected patriarch in 1580 and died in 1600. Shem'on X was elected in 1600 and, according to a letter of Eliya XIII, died in 1638. Information on the patriarchal succession in the Kochanes patriarchate for the remainder of the seventeenth and the whole of the eighteenth century is scanty and uncertain. The following list, first published towards the end of the nineteenth century by the Anglican missionary William Ainger Wigram, has conventionally been adopted: Shem'on XI (1638–56), Shem'on XII (1656–62), Shem'on XIII Denha (1662–1700), Shem'on XIV Shlemun (1700–40), Shem'on XV Mikha'il Mukhtas (1740–80) and Shem'on XVI Yohannan (1780–1820). These dates fit comfortably with the dates and circumstances for the occasional exchanges of correspondence between the Nestorian patriarchs and the Vatican, and are more plausible than a very different set of reign dates proposed shortly after the First World War by the Nestorian bishop Eliya Abuna of Alqosh. But neither Wigram nor Eliya named his source, so it is impossible to be sure whether either list is based on reliable evidence. For the time being most scholars are content to accept Wigram's list, but only provisionally. It is always possible that one day more reliable information may turn up.

The Rival Hierarchies, 1553–1600. The schism of 1552 was prompted by the consecration of two underage bishops by the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on VII Isho'yahb. In the decades immediately following the schism both factions bolstered their support by consecrating as many bishops as they reasonably could. Most of these bishops are mentioned in the correspondence between the rival patriarchs and the Vatican, in the reports of European missionaries, or in the colophons of Nestorian and Chaldean manuscripts. Yohannan Sulaqa (1553–5), the first Chaldean patriarch, is said to have consecrated five metropolitans and bishops during his brief patriarchate. They were very probably the metropolitans Eliya Asmar and 'Abdisho' Maron, consecrated for Amid and Gazarta respectively in 1554, Sulaqa's brother Joseph, consecrated for Seert, and the metropolitans Gabriel of Hesna d'Kifa and Hnanisho' of Mardin.

Sulaqa's successor 'Abdisho' IV Maron had at least seven bishops, but probably not many more. A letter he sent to Pope Pius IV in 1562, claiming a hierarchy of thirty-eight metropolitans and bishops, cannot be taken seriously. 'Abdisho', as he demonstrated in his account of Sulaqa's consecration at Rome in April 1553, was given to fantasy, and the letter of 1562 grossly exaggerated the extent of his support. As far as can be determined, his bishops included Eliya Asmar and Joseph Sulaqa, consecrated by his predecessor for the dioceses of Amid and Seert; Hnanisho' of Mardin and Gabriel of Hesna d'Kifa, also consecrated by Sulaqa; the future patriarch Shem'on VIII Yahballaha, who succeeded 'Abdisho' as metropolitan of Gazarta; the future patriarch Shem'on IX Denha, metropolitan of Salmas; and the metropolitan Abraham of Angamale, consecrated for India in 1559. He may also have had two or three bishops for the villages of the Urmia plain and the Shemsdin and Tergawar districts. Eliya Asmar and Joseph Sulaqa were sent to India shortly after 'Abdisho's accession, and although Eliya soon returned to Kurdistan his brother remained metropolitan of India from 1555 until his death in 1569. Deported twice by the Portuguese, he was only resident in India for part of this period (1556–8 and 1565–8). The full title of Shem'on Denha's diocese was 'Salmas, Seert and Jilu', and this odd combination of districts requires some explanation. He was in fact a metropolitan of Salmas, whose diocese included not only the indigenous Christian population but also the Nestorian deportees from Jilu who had been resettled in the Salmas district a century earlier; and was probably given additional responsibility for Seert during Joseph Asmar's absence in India.

The fourth Catholic patriarch Shem'on IX Denha (1580–1600), under pressure from his Nestorian rival Eliya VII, abandoned the western centres of Amid and Mardin which had supported the union with Rome, and governed his Church from the remote monastery of Mar Yohannan in the Salmas district. During his own lifetime he retained the loyalty of the western bishops, and he also strengthened the hierarchy he had inherited by creating several new dioceses beyond the western districts. His supporters, mentioned in a letter of 1580 which he sent to Pope Gregory XIII shortly after his consecration, included not only the bishops of the western dioceses of Amid, Mardin, Seert, Atel and Gazarta, but also the metropolitans of Salmas, Jilu, Shemsdin and 'Koma' (probably the monastery of Mar 'Abdisho' of Kom in the 'Amadiya district), three other metropolitans whose dioceses are not specified, and the bishop Yohannan of 'Chelhacke', a district which cannot be confidently localised but may have been Kirkuk (Slokh). In India, the metropolitan Abraham of Angamale was also a member of his hierarchy.

The Nestorian patriarch Shem'on VII Isho'yahb (1538–58), who continued to reside in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, the traditional patriarchal seat,

responded to Sulaqa's challenge by consecrating two metropolitans, Isho'yahb for Nisibis, nominally with jurisdiction also over Amid and Mardin, and Joseph for Gazarta. Isho'yahb was probably unable to exercise his authority in Amid and Mardin, both of which had Catholic metropolitans, but Joseph seems to have been accepted in Gazarta. Shem'on's nephew Eliya, who had been consecrated metropolitan of Mosul in 1543, continued to hold this dignity as *natar kursya* until he succeeded his uncle as patriarch in 1558; and the Mosul and 'Amadiya districts certainly remained loyal to Shem'on VII. Eliya VII (1558–91) had a hierarchy of four metropolitans (for Mosul, Berwari, Nisibis and Urmia) and at least two bishops, both of whom sat in the Gazarta region. Mosul was the chief Nestorian citadel, and Leonard Abel remarked in 1587 that although Sulaqa and his three successors had all been consecrated patriarchs 'of Mosul', none had been able to wrest the city from their Nestorian rivals. It now became customary in the Mosul patriarchate for the patriarch's *natar kursya* to be also metropolitan of Mosul.

The Rival Hierarchies in the Seventeenth Century. The allegiance of several districts shifted dramatically on the accession of the patriarch Shem'on X in 1600, who divided his residence between Salmas and Kochanes. Shem'on's return to the old faith was welcomed in some districts, enabling him to consecrate bishops for the Atel and Berwari districts, previously dependent on the Mosul patriarchs. On the other hand the western bishops transferred their loyalty to the Mosul patriarch Eliya VIII, mainly because he was felt to be more enthusiastic for the union with Rome than his rival, but perhaps also because they did not wish to be governed by a patriarch unable or unwilling to leave the remote Salmas district. These shifts gave the Mosul patriarchate control of a wide swathe of lowland territory stretching from Amid to Erbil, including the important towns of Amid, Seert, Gazarta, 'Amadiya, Mosul and Alqosh, while Shem'on X was left with the uplands of Bohtan, Berwari and Hakkari, the Salmas district, and the fertile Urmia plain.

Eliya VIII's report of 1610 to the Vatican listed the hierarchies of the two patriarchs. Eliya VIII had five metropolitans, for Amid, Hesna d'Kifa, Nisibis, Gazarta and Mosul; and nine bishops, for Gwerkel, Abnaye, 'Ungi', Seert, Atel, Salmas, Shemsdin, Raikan and Beth Ture ('the mountains'). Eliya claimed that his *natar kursya*, a metropolitan named Shem'on, did not have his own diocese, perhaps in order to score points with the Vatican, which disapproved of hereditary succession. This was a considerably larger hierarchy than his predecessors possessed, but all the metropolitans and several of the bishops named in the report are attested elsewhere, and there is no need to doubt its genuineness. For once, a patriarch of the Church of the East resisted the temptation to lie to the Vatican. The locations of the metropolitan dioceses enumerated in the report

of 1610 present no surprises, but many of the suffragan dioceses are not again mentioned, and were probably *ad hoc* jurisdictions created for the *natar kursya* of the various metropolitans while they were waiting to step into the shoes of their uncles. This was certainly the case for the diocese of Seert, whose bishop Isho'yahb was the nephew and *natar kursya* of the metropolitan Eliya Bar Tappe of Amid and Seert and succeeded him as metropolitan of Seert in 1617; and also for the diocese of Abnaye, a village in the Gwerkel district whose bishop Yohannan copied several manuscripts between 1588 and 1609. It was probably also the case for the dioceses of Raikan, Beth Ture (the Tiari district) and 'Ungi' (probably a village in the Atel district), none of which are mentioned again; and for the dioceses of Salmas and Shemsdin. Eliya's bishops of Salmas and Shemsdin cannot have had much work to do, as the patriarch Shem'on X had a firm lock on both districts, and Eliya probably chose their titles merely to annoy his rival. Atel, however, was certainly a genuine diocese, one or two of whose seventeenth-century bishops are known, and Gwerkel too may have had some pretensions to permanence, as a bishop of Gwerkel is again attested in 1733. Shem'on X had four metropolitans (for Shemsdin, Jilu, Salmas and Berwari), but only three bishops (for Urmia, Sat and Atel). Like his rival Eliya VIII, Shem'on also claimed that his *natar kursya* Addai was a metropolitan bishop without a diocese of his own. The suffragan diocese of Sat, a large village in the Shemsdin district of Hakkari, is not again mentioned, and was surely an *ad personam* diocese created for the *natar kursya* of the metropolitan of Shemsdin. The other dioceses mentioned were more permanent.

Other sources mention several other bishops at this period. Although the content of his two reports largely overlaps, Eliya VIII mentioned several bishops in 1607 who were absent from the 1610 report, including metropolitans of Shigar, Erbil, Lewun, Van and Albaq, and bishops of Nahrawan, 'Vorce', Berwari and Tergawar. Many of these dioceses were as ephemeral as their 1610 counterparts, but their locations are interesting. A number of Nestorian families from the Tkhuma district are known to have migrated in the seventeenth century to the Taimar district, centred on the town of Khoshab between Van and Julamerk, and the enumeration of dioceses for Van, Lewun and Albaq probably reflects a migration of Nestorian Christians into these sparsely-inhabited districts. The 1607 report did not specify the allegiances of the bishops it mentioned, but Yahballaha of Berwari is known to have been dependent on Eliya VIII, and the metropolitans of Shigar and Erbil were probably also among his hierarchy. Two of the bishops mentioned in the report of 1607, Hnanisho' of Van and Abraham of Tergawar, were present at Eliya VIII's synod of Amid in 1616.

Eliya IX Shem'on (1617–60) did not consecrate bishops for the historic dioceses of Erbil, Nisibis and Hesna d'Kifa, probably because their Christian

populations were no longer large enough to need a bishop, and during his reign the Mosul patriarchate consisted of six metropolitan dioceses: Amid, Mardin, Gazarta, Seert, Mosul and Salmas. Several other dioceses were included in Eliya's hierarchy, including Atel in the Bohtan region and Geogtapa and Anzel in the Urmia plain. The colophon of a manuscript copied in the Nestorian monastery of Mart Maryam in Jerusalem in either 1644 or 1651 mentions that the monastery had recently been visited by the bishops 'Abdisho' of Atel and the intriguingly-named Athanasius of Geogtapa. Although Eliya IX corresponded politely with the Vatican, he was not prepared to abandon the traditional Nestorian christological formula. As Shem'on X (1600–38) had similar reservations, the Catholic communities in the Church of the East were left without bishops for several decades, and relied upon the Franciscan missionaries for support.

The extent of the Kochanes patriarchate in the middle of the seventeenth century is known from a letter of June 1653 from Shem'on XI to Pope Innocent X:

Many indeed are the Chaldean [*sic*] Christians under Mar Shem'on, in the following districts: Julamerk, Barwar [Siwine], Gawar, Jilu, Baz, Dez, Tkhuma, Tiyyari, Walto, Tal, Beth Tannura [Berwari], Lewun, Norduz, Salmas, Albaq, Khoshab, Van, Wastan, Neri, Shapatan [Shemsdin], Tergawar, Urmia [Baranduz], Anzel, Sulduz, Eshnuq, Mergawar, Amid and 'Gulnca'. In these regions are 40,000 families, all children of the cell of Mar Shem'on.

With the exception of the mysterious 'Gulnca', a name corrupted beyond recognition by the Vatican scribe who translated this letter, all of these districts can be readily identified. Most of the localities listed are in the Hakkari and Urmia regions, but Amid and Van are interesting inclusions. Both districts were dependent on the patriarch Eliya VIII earlier in the century, but several colophons confirm that they switched their allegiance to the Kochanes patriarch Shem'on XI around the middle of the seventeenth century, probably because of his Catholic sympathies. As far as the Mosul patriarchs were concerned, the loss of these two districts was more than made up for by the defection of the Nestorians of the Salmas district to Eliya IX. The Catholic penetration of the Salmas district was an eighteenth-century achievement. In the seventeenth century Salmas was strongly Nestorian, and its defection from the pro-Catholic Shem'on XI may reflect the influence of the Nestorian metropolitan Isho'yahb of Salmas, who was active in the middle decades of the seventeenth century and is mentioned in a series of colophons from 1667 to 1686.

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The Rival Hierarchies, 1700–1830. A number of eighteenth-century bishops from the Hakkari and Urmia regions are mentioned in the colophons to manuscripts, and their names and the names of their dioceses foreshadowed the organisation described by European and American observers in the middle of the nineteenth century. There are frequent references throughout the eighteenth century to metropolitans named Hnanisho^c, who sat at the village of Mar Isho^c in the Shemsdin district, and whose jurisdiction covered both the Shemsdin and Tergawar districts. Khidr of Mosul mentioned a number of bishops from the Urmia region in 1734, also with names which are paralleled in the nineteenth century: Gabriel, Yohannan, ‘Abdisho^c, Joseph, Abraham and Isha^cya. Colophons also refer to bishops of Berwari named Isho^cyahb, a bishop of Gawar in 1743 named Sliba, and a bishop of Jilu in 1756 named Sargis. Again, these names recur in the nineteenth century.

The metropolitans of Shemsdin and the bishops of Berwari, Gawar and Jilu were certainly loyal to the Kochanes patriarchs, but the allegiance of the bishops of the Urmia plain varied. In the nineteenth century most of the Urmia plain villages were Nestorian, and therefore loyal to the Shem^cons in Kochanes, but in the eighteenth century the Mosul and Kochanes patriarchates were both Nestorian, and many villages were loyal to the patriarchs of the ‘legitimate’ Eliya line. In 1724 the patriarch Eliya XII Denha (1722–78) ransomed a number of Christian women who had been kidnapped at Urmia by brigands. A century later, the Urmia Christians would have looked to the Kochanes patriarchs for help. The loyalties of the bishops of the Urmia plain fluctuated in the eighteenth century, and at least one was a Catholic. A Chaldean metropolitan named Shem^con, from the village of ‘Ada, was sent by the Vatican to India in 1701 to consecrate a Latin apostolic vicar for the Chaldeans of Malabar, and died in India in 1720. By contrast, the bishop Yohannan of Anzel, who resided in the village of Gawilan and died in or shortly before 1755, was certainly a Nestorian, though it is not clear whether his sympathies lay with the Shem^cons of Kochanes or the Eliyas of Mosul.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Mosul patriarchate had lost its influence in the Catholic strongholds of Amid and Mardin, but still retained the loyalty of a considerable section of the Church of the East which wished to remain Nestorian. It is clear from manuscript colophons that most of the numerous East Syrian villages in the Seert, Gazarta, ‘Amadiya and ‘Aqra districts were still Nestorian and loyal to the Eliya line at this period, as were the surviving Nestorian communities in the Erbil and Kirkuk districts. Mosul and several villages of the Mosul plain had important Catholic communities, but the Nestorians remained in the majority, and the monastery of Rabban Hormizd remained a Nestorian citadel until it was abandoned in the 1740s. Curiously, the Mosul patriarchate had

very few bishops to administer these large territories. Apart from the patriarch himself and his *natar kursya*, responsible for the Mosul district, only Gazarta and Seert had bishops at the beginning of the century, and little effort appears to have been made to consolidate the loyalty of other districts by giving them bishops. One seventeenth-century bishop of ʿAmadiya is attested, but ʿAmadiya only became a stable diocese towards the end of the eighteenth century. The patriarch Eliya XII Denha (1722–78) might also have been able to count upon the loyalties of some of the Nestorian bishops of the Urmia region, but it is doubtful whether his hierarchy ever exceeded more than half a dozen bishops, and his policy seems to have been to preserve the *status quo*. He responded sharply to an attempt by Joseph III to consecrate a Catholic metropolitan for Mosul in 1724, and after the consecration of the Catholic bishop Shemʿon Kemo for Seert around 1730 sent a Nestorian bishop to the district during Joseph’s absence in Rome, but on both occasions was merely reacting to a Catholic challenge. This inertia was an important factor in the ultimate success of the Catholic movement.

In October 1779 the recently-enthroned patriarch Eliya XIII Ishoʿyahb, who was still at this period posing as a Catholic, wrote to the Kochanes patriarch Shemʿon XV Mikhaʿil Mukhtas seeking information for a report to the Vatican. In his letter, whose text was published at the end of the nineteenth century by J Babakhan, he mentioned that a synod had recently been held at Alqosh under his presidency, at which the following seven bishops were present: the metropolitan and *natar kursya* Mar Ishoʿyahb; the ‘elderly’ Mar Hnanishoʿ, metropolitan of ʿAmadiya; Mar Shemʿon, bishop of Shigar and Mosul; Mar Yahballaha, bishop of Gazarta; Mar Denha, bishop of ʿAqra; Mar Saba, bishop of ʿBeth Zabeʿ; and Mar Ishoʿsabras, bishop of Erbil. This is a puzzling list, as only the metropolitan Hnanishoʿ is mentioned elsewhere, but it may be genuine and reflect a reaction by Eliya XIII Ishoʿyahb to the conservative policy of his uncle Eliya XII Denha. The diocese of Beth Zabe, not elsewhere attested, doubtless covered the Tiyari district around the Great Zab, whose most famous church was dedicated to Mar Saba. Although the Tiyari district was under the control of the patriarchs of the Shemʿon line by the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of manuscripts were copied at Alqosh for Tiyari villages in the second half of the eighteenth century, indicating that they looked towards Mosul at that time. Some of the bishops mentioned may have been young *natar kursyas*, for whom *ad hoc* dioceses had to be created until a vacancy in one of the traditional dioceses occurred.

For the Amid patriarchate, the eighteenth century was one of almost unbroken success. At the beginning of the century it had only a single metropolitan, for Amid itself. Although rebuffed in an attempt to consecrate the priest Khidr of Mosul

metropolitan for the Mosul region in 1724, Joseph III consecrated metropolitans for Mardin and Seert before his departure for Rome in 1731, bringing over several Nestorian villages in the Seert district from their previous dependence on the Eliya line, and also secured recognition for the Catholic minorities in Mosul and the villages of the Mosul plain. In 1757 La'zar Hindi estimated that there were just under 20,000 Catholics in the Amid patriarchate, of whom about 8,000 lived in the Amid and Mardin districts, 5,000 in the Seert district and 6,000 in the Mosul district. As the East Syrian population of the Mosul patriarchate at this period is unlikely to have exceeded 50,000, of whom perhaps 10,000 lived in the Mosul district, the Catholics by then were probably in the majority in and around Mosul. The scale of the Catholic penetration doubtless encouraged Eliya XII to open negotiations with the Vatican in the 1770s, and Yohannan Hormizd to convert to Catholicism.

During the three troubled decades in which Yohannan Hormizd nominally administered the patriarchate of Babylon, Catholic metropolitans continued to sit at Amid, Mardin and Seert, in the traditional territories of the Amid patriarchate. At the same time, the Catholics made decisive inroads into the territories of the Mosul patriarchate. Catholic bishops were consecrated for 'Amadiya, Kirkuk and Salmas, and a Nestorian metropolitan of Gazarta consecrated by Eliya XII Denha was supplanted by the Catholic metropolitan Giwargis di Natale. From 1812 to 1827, during Yohannan Hormizd's suspension, the Amid and Mosul patriarchates were effectively governed as a single unit by the patriarchal administrator Augustine Hindi. In 1828, while the feud between Yohannan Hormizd and Joseph Audio was still at its height, the Chaldean Church lost more than half its priests during a catastrophic outbreak of plague in the Mosul region. Hundreds of Chaldeans died in Alqosh and other villages, and according to the apostolic vicar Pierre-Alexander Coupperie sixty of the region's eighty Chaldean and Syrian Catholic priests died. In this crisis the places of some of the Chaldean priests were filled by monks from the monastery of Rabban Hormizd.

MONASTICISM

The Effects of the Schism of 1552. The schism of 1552 required the twenty or so functioning monasteries of the Church of the East to settle their allegiances. Sulaqa had been the superior of the patriarchal monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh for several years before the schism, but his controversial challenge to Shem'on VII Isho'yahb was disavowed by most of his fellow monks. The monastery of Rabban Hormizd remained firmly under the control of Shem'on VII Isho'yahb and his successors, as did nearly all the other monasteries in the Mosul

and Gazarta regions. The best the Catholics could do was establish themselves in two hitherto-undistinguished convents in the western regions, Mar Ya'qob the Recluse near Seert and Mar Pethion near Mardin. Sulaqa had consecrated a metropolitan for Seert before his death, and his successor 'Abdisho' IV took over the monastery of Mar Ya'qob the Recluse and fixed his patriarchal seat there. At the same time, the Catholic metropolitan Hnanisho' of Mardin appropriated the monastery of Mar Pethion, next to the Nestorian village of Kharab Olma, for his own use. 'Abdisho's residence in the monastery of Mar Ya'qob revived the flagging fortunes of Christianity in the Seert district, which had centuries earlier been part of the Nestorian diocese of Arzun. Several manuscripts were copied in the monastery during 'Abdisho's reign by Catholic scribes, including the metropolitans Eliya Asmar of Amid and Hnanisho' of Mardin, and its library was enriched with a number of old manuscripts, some of which came from the decrepit monastery of Beth Qoqa. The monastery of Mar Pethion also became a modest centre of Catholic scribal activity in the 1570s. The Catholics lost control of both monasteries after Shem'on IX Denha moved his seat to Salmas. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the monastery of Mar Ya'qob was the residence of Eliya Bar Tappe, the Nestorian metropolitan of Amid and Seert, who shared it with the Nestorian bishops Yohannan of Atel and Gabriel of Hesna d'Kifa. In 1605 Eliya Bar Tappe hired a Jacobite bookbinder named 'Abdallah, a monk of the monastery of Za'faran near Mardin, to rebind hundreds of the monastery's manuscripts. 'Abdallah may not have enjoyed restoring these heretical texts to their former glory, but he faithfully fulfilled the terms of this important and lucrative commission. The monastery of Mar Pethion was also recovered by the Nestorians and returned to the obscurity from which the Catholics had briefly plucked it. Shem'on IX Denha was reduced to living in the mysterious 'monastery of Mar Yohannan' in the Salmas district, probably a large church rather than a regular monastery.

The reports of 1607 and 1610 mentioned that the Church of the East used to have more than a hundred 'monasteries', and listed more than forty separate buildings still in use at the beginning of the seventeenth century, most of which can be readily identified. The Vatican scribes used the term 'monastery' to translate the Syriac word *'umra*, which could also mean a large church, and more than half of these 'monasteries' (particularly those in the mountainous Hakkari district) were merely churches. Others, however, were genuine monasteries, which had flourished during the great days of the Church of the East. At least sixteen monasteries, most of which could trace their histories back to the Sasanian period, were loyal to Eliya VIII. These venerable convents included Mar Awgin and Mar Abraham of Kashkar near Nisibis; Mar Ya'qob the Recluse near Seert; Mar Yohannan the

Egyptian, Mar Ahha the Egyptian and Mar Isaac of Nineveh near Gazarta; Mar ‘Abdisho’ of Kom near ‘Amadiya and Mar Qayyoma above Dure; Rabban Bar ‘Idta and Beth ‘Abe near ‘Aqra; Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh, Mar Abraham the Mede near Batnaya; Mar Giwargis near Telkepe; Mar Mikha’il and Mar Eliya near Mosul; and Beth Qoqa near Erbil.

The Kochanes patriarchate had nothing to compare with this splendour. The churches of Mar Giwargis in Ashitha, Mar Shallita in Kochanes, Mar Zay’a in the Jilu village of Matha d’Mar Zay’a, Mar Ezekiel in the Shemsdin district and four or five other small sanctuaries in the Hakkari mountains or the Urmia plain, could only be styled ‘monasteries’ by the most generous stretch of the imagination. The possession of the remaining Nestorian monasteries gave the Mosul patriarchate access to the talents of a literate and educated elite, and the literary treasures preserved in their libraries gave an impetus to the scribal profession and probably encouraged the growth of the great scribal families of Alqosh. There were, of course, literate scribes and priests and old manuscripts to be found in the Kochanes patriarchate, but far fewer. The existence of an educated elite of scribes and monks, coupled with the descent of its patriarchs from the old patriarchal family, gave the Mosul patriarchs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a prestige which its Kochanes rivals could never hope to match. This prestige was fully appreciated by the Vatican.

The Decline of Monasticism in the Mosul Patriarchate. Nevertheless, at least three of the sixteen monasteries of the Mosul patriarchate mentioned in the report of 1610 were by now barely functioning. The monastery of Beth Qoqa near Erbil was included in the report by courtesy only. Indeed, Eliya VIII stated that it had declined from the days of its glory a millennium earlier, when ‘a thousand solitaries had lived there,’ and was now no longer occupied. Instead, ‘in this unhappy and degenerate age of ours the monks only live near the monastery, where they refresh all travellers with bread.’ The monastery of Beth Qoqa and its monks are not again mentioned. The monastery of Rabban Bar ‘Idta in the ‘Aqra district seems also to have been included by Eliya VIII in his list purely on account of its former celebrity. No manuscripts from the Ottoman period have survived from this monastery and there are no hints from any other sources that it was still occupied at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It had probably been abandoned during the ‘dark centuries’, and its site, near the modern Muslim village of Helaft, can no longer be identified. The monastery of Beth ‘Abe, whose proud history had been celebrated nearly eight centuries earlier by Thomas of Marga, had also fallen on hard times. Eliya described it as ‘one of the great monasteries in which the suffering find rest and the needy

food; where monks and solitaries live and prayers constantly rise', but admitted that 'at present we only go there rarely to celebrate mass, on account of our feebleness.' Sadly, nothing is known of the ultimate fate of the monastery of Beth 'Abe. It seems to have been abandoned in the seventeenth century, not long after Eliya pronounced his elegy on its decline. Its site, four miles to the south of the Nestorian village of Guppa, has not been determined, and the tombs of its thirty-eight saints and seventy bishops, once held in high honour by the monastery's monks, have vanished without trace.

Beth Qoqa and Beth 'Abe were not the only Nestorian monasteries to fall by the wayside during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the beginning of the nineteenth century few of Eliya VIII's sixteen monasteries were still functioning, and the institution of monasticism had itself almost died out. Manuscript colophons supply the names of around thirty Nestorian monks from the monasteries of the Mosul patriarchate between 1552 and 1808, most of them from the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. Some of these monks, but not many, were scribes. Their number included Shem'on Bakhsho of Mosul in the sixteenth century and Yohannan Kemo of Seert in the seventeenth century, both of whom were also priests and members of priestly families that went back several generations. A manuscript was copied in 1629 for the church of the Mosul plain village of Karsapa by 'the monk and superior Isaac', probably from the nearby monastery of Rabban Hormizd. Several manuscripts were commissioned for the monastery of Mar Abraham the Mede near Batnaya around the end of the seventeenth century, and its superior 'Abdo was among the group of clerics in the Mosul region who converted to Catholicism in 1719 with Khidr of Mosul.

Manuscript colophons also shed some light on the fate of most of the sixteen monasteries loyal to Eliya VIII at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The monastery of Mar Awgin, residence of the Nestorian metropolitan Isho'yahb of Nisibis for several years after the schism of 1552, was abandoned during the seventeenth century. The 'Great Monastery' of Abraham of Kashkar on Mount Izla was also abandoned, at an unknown date. The monastery of Mar Ya'qob the Recluse near Seert remained in the hands of the Nestorians until the middle decades of the eighteenth century, when it became the seat of the Chaldean metropolitan Shem'on Kemo. The monasteries of Mar Yohannan and Mar Ahha near Gazarta were probably both abandoned and locked up in the seventeenth century, though manuscripts were occasionally copied in the monastery of Mar Ahha well into the nineteenth century. The monastery of Mar Isaac of Nineveh seems also to have been shut down in the seventeenth century, but may have been reoccupied around 1780, when a manuscript was copied in the nearby village of Shakh for its 'treasurer', the priest Hanna. By the 1820s, and perhaps as early as

1808, the monastery was the residence of the Nestorian metropolitan Joseph of Gazarta. It is last mentioned in 1826, when a manuscript was copied there by its episcopal occupant. Further to the south, the monastery of Mar ‘Abdisho‘ of Kom, near the Sapna village of Deiri, was intermittently occupied by Nestorian monks during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but by the middle of the eighteenth century had been abandoned. In 1753 it was awarded to the Dominican mission by the governor of ‘Amadiya, and was occupied by Catholic missionaries for around a century until its final abandonment in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The small cave monastery of Mar Qayyoma near the village of Dure, the seat of the Nestorian bishops of Berwari, was used occasionally for worship between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, but seems to have had few, if any, monks.

The monastery of Rabban Hormizd, the most important of the surviving monasteries, remained in use as the summer residence of the Nestorian patriarchs until the middle of the eighteenth century. Besides the patriarchs and their entourage the monastery probably had around half a dozen monks in residence in any given year between 1610 and 1743, though they have left little trace of their presence. Certainly, they took almost no part in the vigorous scribal movement that flourished in neighbouring Alqosh during the reign of the patriarch Eliya X Yohannan Marogin (1660–1700), even though he restored the monastery’s martyrium and baptistry in 1696. The monastery was abandoned for half a century after the Persian invasion in 1743, and only reopened in 1808. The monastery of Mar Abraham the Mede near Batnaya was pillaged by Nadir Shah’s soldiers in 1743 and abandoned thereafter. The monastery of Mar Giwargis near Telkepe flourished for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A dozen or so manuscripts were copied in Alqosh, Telkepe and Mosul for the use of its monks between 1670 and 1778. The monastery was abandoned around the end of the eighteenth century, and in 1808 Yohannan Hormizd offered it to Gabriel Dambo in place of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. Dambo declined the offer, and the monastery remained unoccupied until the 1850s. The monastery of Mar Mikha’il near Mosul had at least one monk in 1587, whose learning was praised by the Vatican’s envoy Leonard Abel, but seems to have been abandoned for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The monastery of Mar Eliya, on the western bank of the Tigris opposite Mosul, was restored to its former splendour in 1657 by a Chaldean commune, and flourished as a Catholic refuge for nearly a century. During this period its ornate furnishings earned it the nickname ‘the decorated monastery’ (*al-dayr al-manqush*). The monastery’s wealth attracted the attention of Nadir Shah’s invading Persian troops in 1743, who sacked it and dispersed its occupants.

The Nestorians also had a monastery of Mart Maryam in Jerusalem between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, first mentioned in 1576, and this monastery too was loyal to the Mosul patriarchs. Ironically, it seems to have been founded shortly after the schism of 1552 by the Chaldean metropolitan Eliya Asmar of Amid, as a guesthouse for Catholic pilgrims to Jerusalem. At some time before 1581 it was confiscated by the local Turkish authorities, who handed it over to the Nestorians. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the guesthouse had become a monastery, whose monks had no qualms about calling themselves Nestorians. Several of the monastery's manuscripts have survived, one of which was copied in either 1644 or 1651 'for the monastery of we Nestorians in Jerusalem'. Considering that the Nestorian monks in Jerusalem would have rubbed shoulders on a daily basis with Christians from other Churches, some of whom would not have concealed their distaste for their heretical neighbours, it is striking that they so readily accepted the name that their enemies had given them. They did so, surely, because they believed that their faith was orthodox, and because they saw no reason to conceal their devotion to the martyred Nestorius. The monastery of Mart Maryam was still in the hands of the Nestorians at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and between 1718 and 1721 its collection of ninety-five books was catalogued by the Nestorian priest Kanun of Telkepe, who was sent to Jerusalem by the Mosul patriarch Eliya XI to restore the monastery. The monastery is last mentioned in 1725, and it is not known when it was abandoned by its monks.

Chance references also suggest that there were other, rather surprising, manifestations of monasticism. In 1593 a nun named Seltana (she is described as a *bart qyama*, or 'daughter of the covenant'), from the village of Beth Megali near Gazarta, purchased a manuscript and donated it to the Nestorian monastery of Mart Maryam in Jerusalem. The Reports of 1607 and 1610 give no hint that the Church of the East still maintained nunneries, and Seltana was probably a nun in Jerusalem rather than in northern Mesopotamia. Interestingly, she was by no means the only Nestorian woman to demonstrate her piety by presenting manuscripts to a monastery or a church. In a perceptive analysis of colophons from the Ottoman period, Heleen Murre-van den Berg has drawn attention to scores of manuscripts which were donated to the monasteries and churches of the Mosul patriarchate during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by well-connected, literate Christian women. The good ladies of the large and prosperous village of Telkepe in the Mosul plain were particularly assiduous in this regard, and several manuscripts donated to the nearby monastery of Mar Giwargis in the eighteenth century were commissioned by women from Telkepe, either individually, or by a mother and her daughters, or by unrelated groups of

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female worshippers. Such acts of 'generous devotion' were both a practical and graceful way of supporting the Church, though they may not always have been entirely selfless. Some of the donors clearly expected to be admired for their piety in this world and rewarded for it in the next.

Gabriel Dambo's Revival of Monasticism. Gabriel Dambo's revival of monasticism in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd was an event of great significance for the nineteenth-century Chaldean Church. In 1827 the monastery had 93 monks, drawn not only from the long-established Chaldean centres of Amid, Mardin and the villages of the Mosul plain, but also from villages in the 'Amadiya and 'Aqra regions which still had significant Nestorian communities. Most of the monks, who were vowed to poverty and celibacy, were from the villages of Telkepe, Alqosh, Tel Isqof and Mengeshe. Dambo set his monks to useful labour, and several dozen manuscripts copied in the monastery during his lifetime have survived. They are a mixture of traditional Syriac and Arabic texts and modern Catholic devotional works. Catholic influence was also evident in the names assumed by many of the monks. Among the scribes active at this period were the monks Clement, Jerome, Augustine and Bernard of Telkepe, Athanasius and Anselm of Tel Isqof, and Damian of Alqosh. An invigorating wind of change was blowing through the Chaldean Church.

Gabriel Dambo also appreciated the importance of a well-educated and disciplined clergy, and believed that his monks would provide the Chaldean Church with the bishops and priests it needed. To a certain extent he was right. Five of the monastery's monks, including the redoubtable Joseph Audo, were consecrated bishops at Amid in 1823. In 1825 twenty-eight monks were sent out from the monastery in pairs of priests and deacons, to Baghdad, Basra and a number of Chaldean villages in the Mosul and 'Amadiya districts. There they did their best to instill the Catholic faith into their congregations. They were better educated than their Nestorian counterparts, having learned both Syriac and Arabic in the monastery, and probably more enthusiastic too, and doubtless made a deep impression on both the children and the adults whom they taught. But while this useful work was going on in the mission field, Gabriel Dambo and his successor Yohannan Gwera spent much of their energies quarrelling with Yohannan Hormizd and his successor Nicholas Zay'a (1838–47). The monastery's monks, who were every bit as partisan in the nineteenth century as their predecessors had been twelve centuries earlier, threw themselves ardently behind their combative superiors. This internecine warfare had very damaging consequences for the morale of the Chaldean Church; and it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century, after all the participants in the disputes of

Yohannan Hormizd's reign had gone to their graves, that Gabriel Dambo's vision for the monastery of Rabban Hormizd was finally realised.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Scribes and Poets. The revival of scholarship and learning in the Mosul patriarchate after the schism of 1552 was not confined to the monasteries. Most of the best scribes at this period were not monks at all. Nearly all of them, however, were either priests or deacons. This was hardly surprising. Very few Nestorian and Chaldean villagers could read or write, but most clergymen were literate, at least up to a point. Outside the monasteries, the work of copying manuscripts had to be done by the clergy, or it would not have been done at all. During the second half of the sixteenth century the most important scribal centre was Gazarta, and the most prolific scribe the priest ʿAtaya of Alqosh, who copied around twenty-five manuscripts between 1536 and 1594 in Gazarta and its neighbourhood. Gazarta was eclipsed in the 1660s by the village of Alqosh in the Mosul plain, which suddenly emerged as the most important Nestorian centre for the copying of manuscripts, a position which it maintained into the twentieth century. The remarkable burst of activity which followed was almost certainly encouraged by the Nestorian patriarch Eliya X Yohannan Marogin (1660–1700), who reacted strongly to the success of the Catholic movement in the Amid region. As many of the manuscripts copied in Alqosh during his reign were Nestorian service books, copied for the use of the clergy in the Mosul patriarchate, he may well have felt that making such works more widely available, especially in villages dependent on the leadership of a single priest, was the most effective way of countering the growing influence of the Catholics.

There were nearly thirty Nestorian scribes working in Alqosh during the reign of Eliya X and his two immediate successors. Most of them came from the local Shikwana and Nasro families, which had been supplying priests and deacons to the Church of the East for several centuries. These two families, which remained Nestorian well into the eighteenth century, dominated the scribal profession at Alqosh for a century and a half. The most prolific of these scribes was undoubtedly the priest Giwargis, son of Israel, of the Shikwana family, who copied at least 48 manuscripts between 1676 and 1727. He served successively as secretary to the patriarchs Eliya XI Marogin (1700–22) and Eliya XII Denha (1722–78). His contemporary the priest Yalda, son of the priest Eliya, of the Nasro family, was the second most productive of the Alqosh scribes, copying at least 32 manuscripts between 1679 and 1728. A fair number of manuscripts were

also copied by Nestorian scribes living in Mosul and Telkepe, but their output pales into insignificance in comparison with the work of the Alqosh scribes.

There was also a modest revival of Syriac literature in the Mosul patriarchate during the seventeenth century, led by the priests Israel of Alqosh and Joseph of Telkepe. Both men wrote not in classical Syriac but in a classicising version of the vernacular dialect of Alqosh, known as Sureth or (in Arabic) Fellihi. Israel wrote four poems in or around 1611, and Joseph five poems between 1662 and 1668, dealing with Christian themes such as repentance, the life and teachings of Christ, and divine guidance. These poems were known technically as *durikyatha* ('hymns'), to distinguish them from the dispute poems and drinking songs that also feature in the Syriac literature of the period. Israel and Joseph were both located firmly within the rich scribal tradition of Alqosh and Telkepe, and were both, as far as is known, Nestorians. Israel, in particular, claimed to have maintained intact the ancient faith, 'corrupted by the Jacobites'. These writers were followed in the eighteenth century by the Catholic priest Sawmo, of the Mosul plain village of Piyoz, who wrote a lament on a plague that struck his village in 1738. A number of compositions by writers from the Hakkari and Urmia regions have also survived, including a poem of 1591 by Mar Hnanisho^c, one of the early metropolitans of Shemsdin. In the Urmia plain, a number of poems were written around the middle of the eighteenth century by the priest Sulaqa of Adarbaigan, cousin of the bishop Yohannan of Anzel (fl.1750). Sulaqa's work has been misdated to the end of the fourteenth century; but his cousin Yohannan, praised in several contemporary colophons for restoring a 'monastery' of Mar Ezekiel in the Shemsdin district, is known to have died either in or shortly before 1755.

One strangely neglected area of the literature of the Syriac revival is the study of the texts of the colophons to Syriac manuscripts. Most undamaged Syriac manuscripts from the Ottoman period are rounded off by long and verbose colophons (*sigome*), which typically give the scribe's name and genealogy, the manuscript's date and place of composition, the name of the person who commissioned it, the church or monastery for which it was copied, and the name of the reigning patriarch and the local metropolitan or bishop. These colophons have an obvious historical interest, and have been mined by several scholars for the valuable local details they often provide, but they have rarely been studied for their literary value. However, as Heleen Murre-van den Berg has observed, they constitute a substantial body of Syriac literature in their own right. Around two thousand Syriac manuscripts with colophons from the Ottoman period have already been catalogued, but there are doubtless many more that have so far escaped notice. Some of them, particularly those composed in the grand style, are most engaging. The deacon Joseph Pallath, a Catholic scribe from the Mosul

plain village of Telkepe, described his village in a colophon of 1812 as ‘the happy and blessed town, renowned for the orthodoxy of its faith, strong in Pauline preaching, full of honest and upright men, abounding in famous and illustrious sons: Telkepe, the town of Jonah the prophet’. This elaborate, incantatory language had a long history in both the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches, and can be traced back at least as far as the thirteenth century, when Bar Hebraeus addressed the Nestorian patriarch Denha I with a similar parade of excessive compliments. A sensitive analysis of these sonorous texts, whose language and style are often echoed in contemporary Syriac poetry, would be a welcome contribution to the study of Syriac literature.

Catholic Literature. Paradoxically, despite the undoubted scholarly ascendancy of the Mosul patriarchate during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most of the literature from the period that is still worth reading today was written by the Chaldeans. Their polemics against the Nestorians have a certain zest that appeals to connoisseurs of invective. One of the best of the Chaldean polemicists was the second Catholic patriarch ‘Abdisho’ IV Maron (1555–70). He had a scant regard for the truth, but wielded the bludgeon to great effect. Among his most impressive compositions were a series of poems on the life of Yohannan Sulaqa, written shortly after the murdered patriarch’s death in 1555. One of these poems was written to rebut criticisms of the underhand tactics used by Sulaqa and his supporters in 1552. Realising that it would be difficult to justify Sulaqa’s rebellion against a reigning patriarch, ‘Abdisho’ launched into a spirited denunciation of his hapless rival Shem’on VII Isho’yahb, accusing him of almost every crime under the sun. Everybody knew that the Catholics had falsely claimed that Shem’on had died in 1551, and ‘Abdisho’ cleverly insisted that Shem’on’s crimes had been so horrifying that ‘he might just as well have been dead’. These masterpieces of controversy, translated by J M Vosté into French in 1931, deserve to be better known.

The Amid patriarch Joseph I, who rekindled the flame of Catholicism in northern Mesopotamia just over a century after ‘Abdisho’’s death, was the subject of an entertaining Arabic biography written around 1700 by his talented disciple ‘Abd al-Ahad, son of Garabet, of the Amid village of ‘Ain Tannur. ‘Abd al-Ahad, who was consecrated metropolitan of Amid in 1707 under the name Basil, knew how to write. In his *Life of Mar Joseph I* he contrasted the sophisticated existence of the Catholics of cosmopolitan Amid with the primitive squalour in which their benighted Nestorian opponents lived in the mountains beyond Mosul. As any of the dedicated Nestorian scribes then working at Alqosh could have pointed out, this portrayal was an absurd caricature; but it no doubt raised smiles among

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‘Abd al-Ahad’s readers. A French translation of ‘Abd al-Ahad’s biography was published in 1898 by J B Chabot.

The Chaldean writers were not only masters of controversy. They had also to sustain the faith of the Catholic minority in troubled times. The patriarch Joseph II wrote two works of Catholic piety, the *Book of the Magnet* and the *Book of the Polished Mirror*, both of which were originally composed in Arabic but later translated into Syriac to gain a wider audience. In the *Book of the Magnet* Joseph quoted extensively not only from much-loved Syrian authors such as Ephrem but also from the Western fathers, introducing his readers to a wider circle of Christian authorities than the Nestorians would have known. In the *Book of the Polished Mirror* he wrote as a loyal son of the Vatican. He demonstrated that the Roman Church was the head of all Churches and the pope was the father of all Christians, defended the dogmas of the Catholic Church against the Nestorians, attacked the Jacobites and the Armenians for their heretical christologies, explained certain peculiarities of Catholic faith such as the double procession of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of purgatory, and refuted objections that had been made against aspects of the Catholic liturgy. Writing to cheer an embattled minority, Joseph dealt brusquely and vigorously with his heretical opponents.

One of the most important Chaldean writers in the first half of the eighteenth century was Khidr of Mosul, a Nestorian priest who converted to Catholicism in 1719 because the Chaldeans upheld the ideal of priestly celibacy. Khidr was consecrated metropolitan of Mosul by the Amid patriarch Joseph III in 1723, but was immediately driven out by the Nestorians and forced into exile in Aleppo. He spent much of the rest of his life in Rome, working for the Chaldean cause. Khidr wrote in both Syriac and Arabic, and was the author of a varied *oeuvre*. He wrote several surviving letters to the Mosul patriarch Eliya XII Denha, urging him to convert to Catholicism. If he did, argued Khidr, he would reunite the Church of the East and would be more powerful than any of its patriarchs had been for a long time. The Amid patriarchate would be immediately suppressed, the bishops of the Kochanes patriarchate would gradually come over to his side, and the Vatican would be so grateful that it would grant him the substantial revenues from the Malabar Christians. There is no evidence that Eliya responded to these artful blandishments.

European Scholarship. Before the sixteenth century there had been little or no European scholarly interest in the Church of the East. Things changed once the Europeans won a stake in its fortunes. The creation of the uniate Chaldean Church in 1553 naturally stimulated interest at Rome in the history of the ‘Chaldeans’, and the imposition of the Portuguese *padroado* on the Nestorians of the Malabar

Coast of India at the synod of Diamper in 1599 also stirred scholarly passions. In 1715 Pope Clement XI sent the learned Maronite priest Joseph Simon Assemani (1687–1768) to the monasteries of Egypt and Syria to collect and translate manuscripts bearing on the history of the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches. The result was an impressive advance in scholarship. The four volumes of Assemani's *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, published at Rome between 1719 and 1728, quoted extensively from Syriac and Arabic manuscripts and introduced to European scholars the remarkable intellectual heritage of the Church of the East. Joseph Simon's younger brother Joseph Aloysius Assemani (1710–82) published an important history of the Nestorian patriarchs at Rome in 1775, *De Catholicis seu Patriarchis Chaldaeorum et Nestorianorum*, which traced the patriarchal history of the Church of the East from its legendary beginnings right up to the eighteenth century. Although in many respects superseded by more recent studies, Assemani's book remains an important collection of source material. Another major contribution to the study of the Church of the East was made by the savant Michel Le Quien (1661–1733). The three imposing tomes of his *Oriens Christianus*, published posthumously in 1740, represented the first serious attempt by Europeans to list the patriarchs and bishops and map the dioceses of the Eastern Churches. Most of Le Quien's information on the Church of the East came, via Assemani, from authorities such as Mari and Bar Hebraeus, and he sometimes made improbable identifications when these sources let him down. But given the relatively limited information at his disposal, his preliminary sketch of the Church of the East was a creditable effort, and his researches laid the foundations for more scientific studies in the nineteenth century.

By 1788, when the final volumes of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* were published, the main outlines of the history of the Church of the East were clear, though many points of detail were not. Gibbon, whose contempt for Christianity was notorious, amused himself with a detailed description of the Nestorian controversy, which allowed him full rein for an attack on the internal discords of Christendom, but devoted only two paragraphs in the forty-seventh chapter of his work to the history of the Church of the East. In one paragraph he dealt with the history of the Malabar Christians of India, and in the other he summarised fourteen centuries of the history of the Nestorian Church. He relied heavily on Assemani for his information, though he occasionally misunderstood him, and was poorly informed on contemporary developments. He was almost certainly unaware of the dispute between Yohannan Hormizd and Eliya XIII Isho'yahb, which was raging furiously when he wrote the final two sentences of his first paragraph, and would in any case have dismissed the schism in the patriarchate of the 'Elijahs of Mosul' as beneath his notice:

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The old patriarchal trunk is now divided by the *Elijabs* of Mosul, the representatives almost in lineal descent of the genuine and primitive succession; the *Josephs* of Amida, who are reconciled to the church of Rome: and the *Simeons* of Van or Ormia, whose revolt, at the head of forty thousand families, was promoted in the sixteenth century by the Sophis of Persia. The number of three hundred thousand is allowed for the whole body of the Nestorians, who, under the name of Chaldeans or Assyrians, are confounded with the most learned or the most powerful nation of Eastern antiquity.

Travel Memoirs. A number of valuable descriptions of the Nestorians and the Chaldeans were made during the Ottoman period by European travellers who passed through Kurdistan en route to Persia or India. Among the more important texts are the *Six Voyages* and the *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant* by the seventeenth-century French travellers Jean-Baptiste Tavernier and Jean Thévenot; the *Reisebeschreibung von Arabien und anderen umliegenden Ländern*, the record of an exhausting tour of Arabia and the Middle East in the 1760s by the German explorer Carsten Niebuhr; and the *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman, l'Égypte et la Perse* by the French entomologist Guillaume-Antoine Olivier, published in 1807. The itineraries of most European travellers took in Nisibis, Amid, Mardin, Mosul and Baghdad, and their observations enable the decline of Christianity in the cities of the Tigris valley to be reconstructed in considerable detail. In 1644, for example, Tavernier noted that Nisibis still had a largely-Christian population, and that its celebrated Nestorian church of Mar Ya'qob had been taken over by the Armenians. The fortunes of Nisibis evidently dwindled during the next century and a half, as in 1791 Olivier described this once-proud metropolis as 'a poor village of at most 1,000 inhabitants, nearly all Kurds or Arabs'. The literary appropriation of other cultures was not entirely a one-way process. The European Orientalists were not without their Occidentalist counterparts in the Church of the East. Joseph Sulaqa, the brother of the first Chaldean patriarch Yohannan Sulaqa (1553–5), was appointed metropolitan of India in 1555. He spent much of his episcopate in Portuguese custody, and used his enforced idleness to record his impressions of Bassein, Mozambique and Lisbon. One of the more curious literary survivals from the seventeenth century is the diary of Ilyas Hanna, a Chaldean Christian from Mosul who visited Europe and South America in the 1670s. Ilyas, a figure of some consequence who was perhaps employed on a low-level diplomatic mission, moved easily in European court circles and eventually won the confidence of the Spanish, who permitted him to roam freely within their extensive South American dominions. Ilyas was impressed by the energy of the Catholic missionaries he

met on his exotic travels, and praised them warmly for redressing the losses of the Protestant secession by converting so many heathen natives to Christianity. A partial English translation of this pioneering Arabic description of the New World has recently been published in Nabil Matar's selection of seventeenth-century Arabic travel memoirs, *In the Lands of the Christians*.

Many of the European travellers in Kurdistan merely noted the presence of Eastern Christians in a particular town or village, but one memoir from the early years of the seventeenth century is of particular value, because its author married into a Chaldean family. The Italian traveller Pietro Della Valle, who travelled through Kurdistan in 1617, married a young Chaldean lady from the wealthy Joerida family of Mardin. Della Valle observed that the Chaldeans of Mardin spoke only Turkish and Arabic, while the mountain Nestorians of Kurdistan were still speaking Syriac long after it had died out in the plains. They acknowledged the authority of the local Kurdish emirs, and were occasionally used as soldiers by them. His most interesting observation was that the Syrian Christians were so indifferent to matters of doctrine that it was difficult to distinguish Chaldeans from Nestorians. His 'Babylonian' wife Sitti Maani, who accompanied him in his travels in Persia and died of fever in 1621 at the tragically young age of 23, was not as scrupulous in her Catholic observances as she might have been. Della Valle was not entirely comfortable about her orthodoxy, and felt that she needed just a little more education before she could be considered a good Catholic. Della Valle's memoirs also confirm that Muslim prejudice against the Christians remained as lively as ever. Unlike the churches of Europe, the churches in the towns of Mesopotamia had no cemeteries attached to them, as the local laws required the bodies of Christians to be buried in secluded graveyards in the countryside, well away from the main roads.

The Sian Tablet Controversy. Paradoxically, the single most important stimulus to European interest in the Church of the East during the Ottoman period came neither from Kurdistan nor from India, but from remote China. In 1625 workmen clearing land for a building site in Sian, the old Chinese capital of Ch'ang-an, dug up an imposing black limestone stele over six feet high. The front face of the stele displayed a long Chinese inscription with occasional glosses in another, unknown, language. The inscription was headed by an intriguing title: 'The Tablet of the Spread of the Brilliant Teaching of Ta-ch'in in China'. Above this title an ornate Christian cross was displayed, set in triumph above two clouds and a lotus, the symbols respectively of Taoism and Buddhism. By pure chance, the workmen had unearthed the Nestorian tablet erected in Ch'ang-an in February 781, over eight centuries earlier, by Adam, the Nestorian metropolitan of Beth Sinaye. The

Jesuit missionaries were immediately alerted to this find, and were amazed and delighted to discover that there had been Christians in China centuries before Marco Polo's time. They were not at first sure who these early Christians had been, as they could not read the Syriac script that identified them as Nestorians, but the Jesuits in India soon confirmed that the Sian Tablet was an artifact of the Church of the East. The discovery sparked a freak wave of conversions to Christianity in China, as the tablet's antiquity flattered Chinese self-esteem. The number of Chinese Christians jumped from 2,500 in 1625 to 13,000 in 1627, and reached 40,000 by 1637. Some of these converts even dropped the Jesuit term for Christianity, the 'Teaching of the Master of Heaven' (*t'ien-chu chiao*), and began to call themselves disciples of the 'Latter-Day Brilliant Teaching' (*ching-chiao hou-hsueh*). Committed evangelism has won many converts to Christianity over the centuries, but it is doubtful whether the discovery of a prosaic Christian inscription has ever had so extraordinary an effect.

It took several years for the news of the find to reach Europe. The first translations of the Sian Tablet inscription, by Nicolas Trigault in 1625 and Alvarez Semedo in 1628, were prepared primarily for the use of their peers in the Vatican. The story of the discovery of the Sian Tablet reached a wider European audience only in 1641, when Semedo's *Relação da propagação da fé no reyno da China e outros adjacentes* was published in Madrid. Spanish, French and Italian translations quickly followed, and an English translation was made in 1655. Semedo's book contained a translation of the Sian Tablet inscription, comments on the text and an account of the circumstances of the tablet's discovery. It identified China with Marco Polo's Cathay, finally resolving an old conundrum, and noted that Marco Polo too had mentioned Nestorian Christians in China. The book sold well. Its publication coincided with the overthrow of the Ming dynasty by the Manchus, and Europeans were anxious to read anything that might shed light on the dramatic downfall of one of China's greatest dynasties. The Sian Tablet was given further publicity in 1663 with the publication of *Dell'istoria della Compagnia di Giesu*, Daniello Bartoli's history of the Jesuit order, and in 1667 with the publication of Athanasius Kircher's monumental *China Illustrata*. One of Kircher's main aims was to publicise the important scholarly discoveries made by the Jesuit mission in China, and the discovery of the Sian Tablet headed the list. For the first time, the appearance of the tablet was magnificently reproduced in a large folding plate. Europeans gradually became aware that, long ago in lands of which they had little knowledge, a Christian Church had existed which in its geographical extent had rivalled the Catholic Church in Europe.

The reaction of scholars in Europe to the claims of the Jesuit missionaries for the tablet's antiquity was not always favourable. The methods used by the

Society of Jesus came under sustained attack in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Rationalism and anti-clericalism became fashionable, and opponents of the Jesuit mission in China dismissed its efforts as a misguided attempt to corrupt a civilised nation with primitive superstition. In such an intellectual climate, scholars were not slow to attack the Nestorian inscription as an elaborate forgery concocted by the Jesuits. The first scholar to question the tablet's authenticity was Georg Horn, a Dutch professor of history. Horn made his attack in 1652, and during the next two centuries he was followed by some of the most influential minds of the day, including La Croze in 1707 and Voltaire in 1756 and 1776. Among those who weighed in on the side of the angels was Joseph Assemani. His *Bibliotheca Orientalis* helped to demonstrate that the Sian Tablet was a genuine relic of the Nestorians, and traced the impressive extent of Nestorian missionary activity in Asia.

Chapter Nine
THE AGE OF THE EUROPEAN MISSIONS
(1831–1913)

OVERVIEW

During the nineteenth century Protestant missionaries, first from the United States and Britain and later from Germany, began to compete with the Catholic missionaries who had been working for several centuries among the Nestorians and the Chaldeans. For the first time in its history, the Church of the East came under close and sustained European scrutiny. It has recently been suggested that, on the eve of the First World War, the Nestorians and Chaldeans were mere pawns in the struggle for influence between the European Great Powers. This notion, which assumes that neither the missionaries nor the Syrian Christians among whom they worked were capable of thinking for themselves, is grotesque. The missionaries were not uncritical agents of their national governments, nor were the Syrians slow to exploit the rivalries between the various missions. In fact, the work of the missionaries in Kurdistan was almost entirely beneficial in its effects. The missionaries educated the Syrians, did their best to shield them from the exactions of the local Turkish and Persian officials, introduced them to the best of European thought and tried to cure them of their myopic view of the world. Their labours might have been more effective had they received more cooperation from the leaders of the Church of the East; but the Nestorian and Chaldean patriarchs obstinately refused to take any advice from outsiders. In the Chaldean Church, the damaging discords of Yohannan Hormizd's reign were followed by the equally turbulent reigns of Nicholas I Zay'a (1838–47) and Joseph VI Audo (1848–78). Faction and schism persisted into the reign of Eliya XII 'Abulyonan (1879–94), and although the Vatican did its best to instill some much-needed discipline into the patriarchate of Babylon—in theory a uniate Church which accepted the leadership of Rome—in practice it was rarely able to exercise effective control over the insubordinate Chaldean patriarchs. Their Nestorian counterparts, who owed no allegiance to anyone, rebuffed all efforts by the missionaries to change the customs of their Church, even when such changes were manifestly for the better. They clung stubbornly to the practice of

hereditary succession and refused to purge their liturgy of offensive references to Nestorius.

In recent decades the European missionaries have been criticised for trying to impose their own beliefs upon the Syrians. This charge was certainly true of the Catholic missionaries, who regarded the Nestorians as heretics and wanted to save their souls. The Catholic missionary effort was frankly aimed at redeeming the Nestorians from their lamentable errors and bringing them into the Chaldean Church. It is far less true of the Protestants. Both the American and British missions were established with the aim of reforming the Nestorian Church, not winning converts, and although the Americans eventually changed their policy and established a separate Reformed Nestorian Church, the Anglican mission remained true to its original aims. However, neither the Americans nor the British succeeded in reforming the Nestorian Church from within. In the nineteenth century few Nestorian priests could even read, and ignorance, corruption and superstition pervaded all levels of leadership of the Church. A strong dose of high-minded Victorian uplift, administered by honest men who wanted to preserve, not to destroy, their ancient Church, would doubtless have done the Nestorians a world of good. But there was no chance at all of that happening. Blocked at every turn by delays, excuses and mysterious oriental intrigues, the American and British missionaries fumed impotently at their inability to influence events.

It is easy to understand the frustration they felt at their lack of power. The nineteenth-century missions normally did best in regions where the European powers had imposed colonial administrations. The colonial governments did not always welcome the missionaries unreservedly, and sometimes discouraged proselytism if they thought it might stir up trouble, but in general they gave cautious backing to the work of the missions. In Africa, where they could count upon a degree of support from the colonial authorities, the missionaries were able to get things done. They built schools and churches and, as they saw it, firmly and efficiently organised the natives. Their labours bore fruit almost immediately; and even now, decades after the end of the European colonial era, Christianity in southern Africa continues to thrive. In Kurdistan, by contrast, the missionaries complained constantly of the malice or torpor of the Turkish and Persian governments and the fecklessness and ingratitude of the people they had come to help. Few seeds grew in that stony ground. The Catholic missions made considerable progress in the nineteenth century, but the Protestant missions floundered. The Nestorians wanted the protection of the European Great Powers, not pious platitudes. They showed that very clearly towards the end of the nineteenth century, when there was a brief prospect of a Russian intervention in the Urmia region. Most of the Nestorians of the

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Urmia plain abandoned the Americans and British and promptly joined the Russian Orthodox Church.

A more serious criticism of the missionaries is that they tried to play politics, and that their intrigues brought down upon the Nestorians and Chaldeans the wrath of the Persian and Turkish civil authorities and the semi-independent Kurdish emirs. This charge too does not stand up to serious examination. In 1843 and again in 1846 the Hakkari Nestorians were attacked by the Kurds. The motive for the Kurdish attack was not suspicion of the missionaries' intentions but the treachery of the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XIV Abraham (1820–61), who had broken his promise to support a Kurdish campaign against the Turks. Some of the missionaries dreamed wistfully of a British or American intervention in Kurdistan in support of the Christians, but there is no evidence that these fantasies swayed the policy of the Kochoanes patriarchs. The civil authorities and the Kurdish leaders at first treated the missionaries with a modicum of respect, as they were not sure how much support they enjoyed from their home governments, but they gradually realised that they were harmless. By the end of the nineteenth century Turkish and Persian officials felt confident enough to ignore the missionaries, and airily brushed off their complaints and representations.

As the missionaries were in no position to convert Muslims or Yezidis to Christianity, their fierce competition for souls did not add to the total number of Christians. The net result of the nineteenth-century missions was that a large number of Nestorians joined either the Chaldean Church or the Russian Orthodox Church. A rather smaller number became Protestants. For those who attach little importance to religious labels, this may not seem to add up to much. But there were other, more substantial, achievements to the missionaries' credit. Some of the Nestorian and Chaldean bishops and priests were devoted and capable ministers. The missionaries befriended these men and furthered their education. Their presence also helped to improve the administration of both Churches, and their membership grew substantially in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Chaldean Church gradually began to acquire the patina of a modern Catholic Church, and the monastic order founded by Gabriel Dambo in 1808 finally began to function as its founder had hoped. In 1854 the Vatican paid for the construction of the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences near Alqosh, which soon eclipsed the monastery of Rabban Hormizd as the principal seminary of the Chaldean Church. The missionaries also made a most important contribution to scholarship. Thanks to their efforts to locate, translate and edit key Syriac and Arabic texts, the nineteenth century was a golden age for scholars of the Church of the East. This age came abruptly to an end in 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Early Protestant Contacts with the Church of the East. The triumph of Catholicism in the Mosul patriarchate in the 1830s was largely due to the work of French and Italian missionaries. Hitherto they had faced little competition in the mission field, but in the 1820s and 1830s American and British Protestant missionaries began work in the Urmia and Hakkari regions, among the Nestorians of the Kochanes patriarchate. Although Catholic missionaries had been active among the Eastern Churches since the sixteenth century, the Nestorian Church remained almost unknown to the Protestant world until the 1820s, when the newly-formed English and American missionary societies learned of its existence from the reports of travellers in the Middle East. Their interest was aroused, and for the rest of the nineteenth century English and American missionaries competed vigorously with their Catholic rivals for the allegiance of the Nestorians.

The first into the field were the American Presbyterians. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, founded in 1810 and the principal channel for American missionary activity in the first half of the nineteenth century, established its first mission station in the Ottoman Empire at Smyrna in 1820. In 1823 a second station was opened in Beirut and in 1830 a third at Constantinople. The Board learned of the existence of the Nestorians in 1825 from newspaper summaries of an article on Christians in the Ottoman Empire by Robert Walsh, the chaplain of the British embassy at Constantinople. This article, which was reproduced at length in the *American Missionary Herald* in 1826, contained only brief and confused references to the Nestorians, but it was enough to fire the imagination of the Board. Two of its missionaries in Turkey, Eli Smith and Harrison Dwight, who were then engaged in surveying Asia Minor and Armenia, were instructed to proceed to Kurdistan. There, they were told, they would find 100,000 'Nestorian Christian Kurds' and their hereditary patriarch, earning a livelihood as a 'company of wandering shepherds'. They were to make contact with them, and were also to keep an eye out for the Chaldeans, another large and independent Christian group.

Armed with this vague brief the two men began to make enquiries. They soon discovered that there was a Nestorian community at Urmia, which could be reached more easily than the 'Kurdish shepherds' in their mountains, and which had already been visited by English missionaries. They spent a week with the Urmia Nestorians in 1831, an experience which both men found deeply moving. They were impressed not only by the unusual beauty of the countryside, but also by the Nestorians themselves. Ignoring the evidence of their own eyes, they praised the degenerate Kochanes patriarchate in extravagant terms. Like the

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defenders of a beleaguered fortress, they asserted, the Nestorians had maintained the Christian faith in the heart of the Islamic world for more than a thousand years. They had suffered fearful losses, but the survivors remained faithfully at their posts, with no thought of surrender. They were not illiterate nomads, but a disciplined community which remembered with pride the historic missionary achievement of the Church of the East. They still spoke and read Syriac, an ancient language which they had preserved loyally since the time of Jesus. Their history went back far before the Reformation, yet they owed no allegiance to the pope. Unlike the Catholics, they did not believe in auricular confession, and their ceremonies and practices had a pleasing simplicity which appealed to the Protestant mind. If encouraged, the American missionaries concluded, they were well placed geographically to subvert Islam in both Turkey and Persia. A wildly optimistic report was sent back to America, and in 1834 the Board established an American mission in Urmia, led by the Presbyterian minister Justin Perkins.

The activities of the American missionaries in Kurdistan encouraged the Church of England to send its own representatives to Kurdistan. The English missionary societies first became aware of the Nestorian Church in 1820. In 1820 Claude James Rich, an East India Company official stationed at Baghdad and a keen amateur archaeologist, began exploring to the east of Mosul for the site of the ancient city of Nineveh. His activities brought him into contact with a number of Chaldean Christians, and from them he heard of the mountain Nestorians. As a result of his reports the Anglican priest Joseph Wolff went to Mosul in 1826, obtained a copy of the Syriac New Testament, and on his return to England persuaded the British and Foreign Bible Society to produce a printed version. When this was ready, in 1827, he returned to Persia and distributed copies to the Nestorians of Urmia.

Further British contacts with the Church of the East were made in the 1840s. The geologist William Ainsworth, who had stumbled upon the Christian communities around Mosul during an expedition to explore the navigability of the Euphrates in the 1830s, was sent to Kurdistan in 1839 on a mission of enquiry sponsored jointly by the Royal Geographical Society and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, meeting the patriarch Shemʿon XVII Abraham (1820–61) near Julamerk in June 1840. He was accompanied by Christian Rassam, the British consul at Mosul. In 1843 the Anglican priest George Percy Badger, who was related to Rassam by marriage, was sent to Mosul by the archbishop of Canterbury. Both men recorded their impressions of the Chaldeans and the Nestorians, and concluded that the Church of England had a duty to reform the Nestorian Church and undermine the influence of the American Presbyterians, whom the Anglicans considered to be little better than Catholics. Although

Badger only stayed in Kurdistan for a year, visiting the Chaldean dioceses and the Nestorian villages around Ashitha, he made a good impression on Shemʿon XVII. He stressed that the Anglicans wished simply to help the Nestorians in any way they could, unlike the other foreign missions in Kurdistan, and had no intention of forcing them to abandon their traditional beliefs and customs.

The Tiyyari and Tkhuma Massacres (1843–6). During his short stay among the Nestorians Badger witnessed a savage attack on the Nestorian Christians in the Hakkari region by their Kurdish neighbours. For over four hundred years the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire had lived a practically autonomous existence. The control of the Turkish sultans over their eastern Anatolian provinces had always been little more than nominal, and in the 1830s the tribal chieftains of Kurdistan were able to carve out a virtually independent Kurdish confederacy under the leadership of Badr Khan Beg, chief of Bohtan. One of the most important of Badr Khan's allies was Nurallah Beg, the emir of Hakkari, who was vaguely recognised by the Nestorians as their overlord. In 1841, after the patriarch Shemʿon XIV Abraham refused to concede civil jurisdiction over the Nestorian tribes to the Kurdish emir, Nurallah burned down the patriarchal residence in Kochanes. Nurallah and Shemʿon were formally reconciled shortly afterwards, but the emir continued to claim civil jurisdiction over all the Nestorian tribes.

In the summer of 1842 the Kurds launched an expedition against the Turkish governors of Mosul and ʿAmadiya. The Turks placed the Kurdish stronghold of ʿAmadiya under siege, and the Kurdish leaders urged the Nestorian patriarch to join them. Mar Shemʿon promised his support; but instead of joining the Kurds, he betrayed their plans to the Turkish authorities and protested his loyalty to the Ottoman government. The Kurdish campaign around ʿAmadiya ended in failure, and the Kurdish leaders blamed their defeat on the Nestorian patriarch. Nurallah decided to take his revenge. He was aware that Mar Shemʿon had recently been visited by the American missionary Asahel Grant and the English missionary George Percy Badger, but he was also aware that the missionaries wanted merely to set up schools among the Nestorians, not to incite them against the Kurds. Grant had remained studiously neutral during the crisis, and while Badger encouraged Mar Shemʿon to stand up to the Kurds, and even held out the prospect of British intervention, it is doubtful whether the patriarch took the vapourings of a lone missionary seriously. Shemʿon XIV defied the Kurdish emirs not because he hoped for anything from the British, but because he expected the Turks to stand by him.

Nurallah first enlisted Badr Khan Beg on his side, and then isolated the Nestorian patriarch by outbidding him with the Turks. The Kurds asked permission from the Turkish governors of Mosul and ʿAmadiya to attack the

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Nestorians, and it was willingly given. The Turks hoped that a war between the Kurds and the Nestorians would weaken both sides, enabling Ottoman forces to crush the Kurds at a later date. As soon as their preparations were ready, the Kurds advanced up the Great Zab and attacked the Nestorian villages of Upper and Lower Tiyari. About 10,000 men out of a total Nestorian population of 50,000 were killed, and many women and children were carried off by the Kurds as captives. The patriarch's elderly mother was raped and then beheaded, and her murderers threw the corpse into the Great Zab with the words 'Tell your son he can expect the same treatment!' The survivors fled to Mosul, where Badger was able to shelter the patriarch, probably saving his life. Badger and the other Western missionaries in Turkey spent the next few months doing what they could to assist the Nestorian fugitives at Mosul, and were able to ransom a number of Nestorian girls who would otherwise have been sold as slaves. They also attempted, quixotically, to persuade the Ottoman authorities to compensate the Nestorians for their material losses.

For the next three years things were relatively peaceful, but Badr Khan Beg and Nurallah had not finished with the Nestorians. In October 1846 their militias sacked the large Nestorian village of Ashitha in Lower Tiyari, which had been spared in the 1843 invasion, and then advanced on the prosperous Nestorian villages of the Tkhuma district. The Tkhuma villagers were promised shelter by the agha of Chal, but this offer appears to have been merely a ruse to enable the Kurds to catch the Christians in the open. On its way to Chal, a large column of Tkhuma villagers was encircled and slaughtered by the Kurds. The invaders also sacked every village and destroyed every church in Tkhuma. Women and children were taken alive, to be sold into slavery, but the Kurds killed every man they caught. Nurallah presided in person at a massacre in one Tkhuma village. He showed how little he cared for the prospects of intervention by the European great powers by ordering his men to show no mercy to the villagers. 'Kill them all! Let us see whether the English consul at Mosul can raise them from the dead!' Dazed by the ferocity of the Kurdish onslaught, the survivors fled over the border into Persia.

The harrying of Tkhuma was the last outrage of the independent Kurdish emirs. Coming so soon after the 1843 massacre, the invasion provoked a strong protest from the British government. In the past, distracted by Muhammad Ali's insurrection in Egypt and Syria, the Turks had shrunk from challenging Badr Khan Beg openly. Now, encouraged by the British, they decided to destroy his power by force. Local militia under the governors of Erzerum, Jazira and Mosul sealed off the Bohtan mountains on three sides and an Ottoman army advanced up the Bohtan river into the heart of Badr Khan Beg's domain. His strongholds were captured, and the main Kurdish army was routed near Seert in 1847. Badr

Khan Beg and Nurallah were both captured and exiled, and by 1850 Ottoman rule was at last firmly established in Kurdistan.

The American and Anglican Missions. The American mission established in Urmia in 1834 continued without interruption until the First World War. Justin Perkins himself worked in Persia for 35 years, from 1834 until shortly before his death in 1869, and he and his assistant Asahel Grant did much to raise public awareness of the Nestorian Church and its history in the United States and Europe. The first American missionaries strove to revive the Church of the East from within. They translated the Bible into the Syriac dialect of the Urmia region, so that it could be readily understood by their hearers, and set up a printing press so that copies could be widely distributed. They opened two schools in Urmia, one for boys and one for girls, and concentrated on moulding the character of the younger generation. Although they allowed their favourites to take part in their own Protestant services, they were careful not to make converts. Instead, they encouraged their adherents to continue to attend their local churches. In 1870, however, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions transferred the Urmia mission to the Presbyterian Church. The American missionary approach changed significantly as a result. Despairing of any prospect of substantial reform in the Church of the East, the Presbyterians abandoned the revivalist strategy of their predecessors and tried instead to convert the Nestorians to Protestantism. In 1874 they established a Reformed Nestorian Church, which numbered around 2,700 members on the eve of the First World War. These members came not only from the city of Urmia itself, but from the farming communities of the Urmia plain, where the Americans ran a network of more than sixty village schools.

The massacre of 1843 led to the withdrawal of the Anglican observers from Mosul. Badger's work was not followed up for some years, until in 1868 a party among the Hakkari Nestorians sent a request to the archbishop of Canterbury for more help. The request was in the form of a petition signed by the bishop Sliba of Gawar and a number of other Nestorian clerics. The petition was organised without the knowledge of the patriarch Shem'on XVIII Rubil (1861–1903), the successor of Shem'on XVII Abraham, and probably reflected a factional struggle within the Church. Most of the signatories were from the villages of Lower Tiyari and Tkhumā, the districts devastated by the Kurds in 1843 and 1846, and their populations were particularly anxious to gain the political protection which might result from a renewed Anglican mission. In response to this appeal the Anglican priest Edward Cutts was sent out to investigate in 1876. Cutts made an optimistic report, and in 1881 the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to Assyrian Christians was established, over the protests of the aggrieved Americans in Urmia. The first

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head of the Anglican mission, a temperamental Austrian named Rudolph Wahl, was recalled after antagonising both the Nestorian hierarchy and the Turkish and Persian governments, and in 1886 the mission was re-established on a firmer basis by the Anglican priests Athelstan Riley, Arthur Maclean and William Browne. The mission continued from that time without interruption until the First World War, and its aims were to strengthen the spiritual life of the Church of the East by befriending and training its more enlightened priests and by establishing schools where Nestorian children could be given a good education. By the 1890s the Anglicans had established just under forty schools in the villages of the Urmia plain and the Tergawar district.

At first the activities of the Anglican missionaries were restricted to their base at Urmia, where they directly competed for influence with the American mission, but after a while Browne was sent at the patriarch's request to Kochanes, where he lived in some isolation for several years. In Urmia the missionaries favoured either clerical or academic dress, but Browne in Kochanes went native. A trimly-barbered figure in gown and bands in an early photograph from Urmia, he grew a wild beard at Kochanes, adopted rope sandals and turban, and carried the crook of a Syrian monk in token of his spiritual authority. The Victorian traveller Isabella Bird, who met him on a mountain track during her traverse of the Nestorian country in 1891, was disconcerted to discover that the unprepossessing figure she had taken for a Syrian shepherd was in fact an ordained priest of the Church of England. Browne's colourful personality and eccentric dress endeared him to the villagers of Kochanes. They regarded him as something of a substitute for the recently-deceased Rabban Yonan, a much-loved solitary from the Tkuma village of Gundiktha and the last-known representative in the Kochanes patriarchate of a centuries-old monastic tradition. Eventually, in his fifties, Browne sought permission from the archbishop of Canterbury to marry the patriarch's 13-year-old daughter Surma. Unsurprisingly, his request was refused, and the pair instead took vows of celibacy. Browne died at Kochanes in 1904, and with his death the Anglican mission lost what small influence it had been able to exert over the patriarch's policy.

Western Impressions of the Nestorians. Whereas the Chaldean patriarchs were simply religious leaders, whose succession depended to a large extent on the consent of the Ottoman authorities, the Kochanes patriarchs were also semi-independent tribal chiefs, who tried, not always successfully, to strike the right balance between obedience to the Ottoman authorities and subservience to the Kurdish emirs. This dual position gave the Kochanes patriarchate a unique character. Nineteenth-century visitors to Kochanes reported stories of a patriarchal rule which resembled

that of a medieval baron. Isabella Bird gave a vivid description of the court of the patriarch Shemʿon XVIII Rubil, who was able to entertain up to a hundred visitors in his residence. He had a special audience room where, surrounded by his bishops and other satellites and accompanied by his jester Shlemun, he received suppliants, listened patiently to their complaints and gravely intoned his decisions. Bird found these occasions trying, as the audience hall had no ventilation and the air soon became thick with the smoke from a hundred chibouks. The Kochanes patriarchs derived an income from the farm produce of their parishioners, and took a share of church collections. Their rule ultimately rested on the prestige of the patriarchal family, which was recognised by all Nestorians, and it was common for ordinary Christians to swear an oath 'by the head of Mar Shemʿon'.

The patriarch was assisted by a senior metropolitan or *mutran*, invariably named Hnanishoʿ, in charge of the large diocese of Shemsdin, who deputised for him and enjoyed almost as much prestige as the patriarch himself. There were around fourteen dioceses in the Kochanes patriarchate in the nineteenth century, divided roughly equally between the Hakkari region of Turkey and the Urmia region of Persia. The Nestorian bishops tended to be less well-educated than their Chaldean counterparts and also poorer, as they relied on tithes from the congregations in their dioceses for their support. The Nestorian bishops of the prosperous Urmia plain were usually richer and better educated than the bishops of the Hakkari uplands. Some of the suaver Urmia bishops, particularly Gabriel of Ardishai, favourably impressed the English and American missionaries; but the Europeans could scarcely conceal their scorn for the rustic bishops of Hakkari, some of whom could scarcely read. Most Nestorian bishops and priests dressed more like brigands than members of the clergy, habitually travelled with an armed escort, and in some cases owed their appointments to their prowess as warriors. The only qualification for office was the ability to read Syriac, and in a world where Kurdish raids were daily feared, bishops and priests were expected, if necessary, to lead their flock into battle. They, in turn, hoped to win prestige by marrying their relatives into the family of the patriarch. Each patriarch was accustomed to designate his successor from among his younger relations. Those who wished to be considered for the honour were known as Nazirites. Like their Old Testament counterparts, they lived a communal existence and were required to abstain from meat. Sooner or later the patriarch would choose his successor, and he was thereafter known as the 'guardian of the throne' (*natar kursya*).

Before the nineteenth century few European travellers had ventured into the territories of the Kochanes patriarchate, and virtually nothing was known of its geography. Now, thanks to the reports of Badger and other missionaries, a flood of light fell upon the villages of the Hakkari and Urmia regions. In 1850 the Hakkari

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region was home to around 40,000 Nestorian Christians. They were divided into two groups, the free men or *ashirets* and their vassals or *rayyats*. The *ashiret* group was made up of five large clans. The largest of these clans was the Tiyari (which accounted for about half the total population of the Hakkari Nestorians), whose centre was the village of Chamba d'Malik in the Upper Tiyari district. The church of Mar Saba in Chamba was the most famous sanctuary in the Hakkari region. The other four clans were the small tribe of Dez, responsible for the defence of the patriarch; the large tribe of Jilu, whose centre was the village of Matha d'Mar Zay'a; Baz, whose chief village was Matha d'Baz; and Tkhuma, whose chief village was Tkhuma Gaway. Dependent on these *ashiret* clans were the *rayyats* of Tal, Walto, Ashitha and Ishtazin (Lesser Jilu). The Jilu and Baz clans were concentrated in the upper valley of a tributary of the Shamdinan river, while the other communities lived in narrow belts of fertile land in the mountainous gorge of the Great Zab and its tributaries. Significant Nestorian communities could also be found in the Lewun valley and in the Albaq, Norduz, Van and Taimar districts, in the Gawar plain and in the Shemsdin district to the east of Jilu. There were also a number of Nestorian villages in the Baradost, Tergawar and Mergawar districts, just beyond the unguarded and easily-traversed border between Turkey and Persia, which were physically isolated from the Nestorian villages of the Urmia plain to the east and ecclesiastically linked with the mountain communities.

To the east of the Hakkari region, just across the Turkish border with Persia, around 30,000 Nestorian Christians lived in the Urmia and Sulduz plains on the western shore of Lake Urmia. There were also around 10,000 Chaldean Christians living in the Salmas plain a little further to the north, who lived in 12 villages alongside an isolated Nestorian community in the village of Ula. Physically, the Urmia plain was divided into three districts from north to south, centred around the valleys of the Nazlu (Anzel), Berdesur and Baranduz rivers, and contained about 300 villages, half of which were inhabited by Nestorian Christians. A little over a third of the Nestorian population of the Urmia plain lived in about fifty villages in the Anzel district, and the remainder in Urmia itself and around seventy villages in the Baranduz district. The largest villages were Gawilan, Supurghan and 'Ada in the Anzel district and Ardishai, Charbash, Digala, Dizataka, Geogtapa and Gulpashan in the Baranduz district. To the south of the Urmia plain, 3,000 Nestorians lived in the town of Eshnuq and 23 villages in the Sulduz district. The Nestorians and Chaldeans of the Urmia and Salmas regions shared these territories with around 20,000 Armenian Christians and perhaps 300,000 Muslims.

A closer acquaintance with the Nestorians soon cured the American and British missionaries of their initial tendency to see them through rose-tinted glasses. They

found the patriarch and his metropolitans and bishops devious, rapacious and uncooperative, more interested in pursuing private vendettas than in improving the condition of their Church. Most of the missionaries were frankly disappointed by the frivolity of the patriarch Shemʿon XVIII Rubil, who appeared to have little sense of the responsibilities of his office and deferred to the *mutran* Isaac Hnanishoʿ on all questions of religious policy. Coached by the *mutran*, he insisted that the Church of the East had maintained its orthodoxy for more than a millennium, and refused to accommodate himself to the wishes of the missionaries by abolishing hereditary succession to the episcopate or removing embarrassing references to Nestorius from the service books. The ordinary Syrians were as uncompromising as their leaders, and were also ignorant, superstitious and prone to drunkenness, three traits that they shared with many of the priests of the Kochanes patriarchate. Magic spells and charms against the evil eye were widely used, both by priests and laymen. Poverty was endemic, and most of the churches in the Kochanes patriarchate were little more than simple stone cubes, built with low entrance doors to prevent the Kurds from stabling cattle in them. Some of these churches were said to be many hundreds of years old, but they were completely unadorned. Few of the fine churches built before the fourteenth century were left, and those that survived were in the hands of the Chaldeans. Inscriptions and carvings in one or two old Chaldean churches in Mosul hinted at a lost age of elegance, but centuries of neglect and spoliation had reduced even these buildings to a shadow of their former selves. In the eyes of the missionaries, the Chaldean cathedrals were less imposing than the humblest village church in England. They sometimes forgot that these buildings had been repeatedly ransomed by their worshippers since the Arab conquest, and that most items of value had long ago been sold off to raise money to buy the forbearance of corrupt Turkish officials.

On reflection, the Anglicans decided that the Syrians' lack of education might not necessarily be a bad thing. The Protestant missionaries were sensitive to the charge of their Catholic rivals that they were consorting with heretics, and were not altogether displeased to find that the Nestorians 'were too ignorant to profess Nestorianism intelligently'. With luck and perseverance, they might yet be brought out of their darkness. Not all the Nestorian priests were backward, and the missionaries helped the brighter ones to minister more effectively to their congregations. There were other compensations too. The missionaries rather liked the talkative Nestorian children who attended their schools, and they also enjoyed many aspects of the exotic tribal life pursued amid the sublime mountains of Hakkari and in the fertile plain of Urmia. However, some of the Syrian customs could be disconcerting to the Victorian mind. One Anglican missionary retired in confusion after a young Nestorian woman, bathing naked

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in a mountain stream near the Hakkari village of Mar Behisho^c, rose respectfully to her feet at his approach.

For their part, the Nestorians made the most of the presence of the missionaries. They enrolled eagerly in the mission schools, as the skills they learned there gave them a wonderful opportunity to leave Kurdistan and emigrate to Europe or America. They used the good offices of the missionaries to help them in their interminable disputes with the civil authorities. Turkish and Persian officials could not treat these influential foreigners with quite the same brusqueness as they did the despised Syrians, and in some cases the missionaries were able to secure redress for the minor injustices that were the daily lot of Christians living under Ottoman and Persian rule. The Nestorians were also adept at exploiting the tensions between the Catholic and Protestant missions, and playing off one set of missionaries against another. It did not take the missionaries long to pick up the local customs, and they soon entered into the spirit of things by quarrelling among themselves. A farcical dispute occurred in the early 1890s between the British and French missions over a demand by the Chaldean authorities for the restoration of several deserted Chaldean churches in the Salmas district which had been taken over by the Nestorians. The Nestorians were on weak ground but the British backed them up, and the affair quickly assumed the proportions of a diplomatic incident. The dispute ended in a resounding victory for the Chaldeans and a corresponding loss of face both for the Anglican mission and for the bishop Gabriel of Ardishai, the chief spokesman for the Persian Nestorians. Not long afterwards Mar Gabriel and his entourage were murdered in a private feud while returning to Persia from a visit to the *mutran* in Shemsdin.

The Appeal of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Nestorian leaders continued to take what they could get from the Western missions, but also began to make overtures to the Russian Orthodox Church. The elaborate pomp of the Russian form of worship was certainly more to their taste than the austerities of the Protestant service, but as in their dealings with the American and Anglican missions the calculations of the Syrians were primarily political. They believed that Russia, whose borders had been brought close to the Urmia district after her defeat of Persia and acquisition of Armenia in 1828, was in a stronger position than Britain, France or the United States to protect them against Turkish and Persian oppression. Many Nestorians in Kurdistan abandoned their homes in Turkey or Persia in 1828 and made their way to Yerevan, most of them settling in the nearby village of Koylassar and adopting the Orthodox faith. In 1851 a Nestorian bishop from Persia, Joseph of ^cAda, made a secret visit to Yerevan and Tiflis to discuss possibilities. The leaders of

the Russian Orthodox Church, who knew that the motives for such approaches were either mercenary or political, declined to take the bait. Joseph was politely rebuffed, and one or two later approaches were also ignored. Nevertheless, although Joseph's visit had no immediate practical result, it awakened the interest of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Church of the East. In 1862 the Russian Orthodox archimandrite Sophoniah visited Koylassar, and from there conducted a detailed survey of the Nestorian villages of the Urmia region.

Despite this mission, the Urmia Nestorians saw little reason to give up their own traditions for Russian ways so long as the threat of a further Russian advance encouraged the Persian authorities to treat them gently. However, as the prospect of incorporation into the Russian Empire receded after the Crimean War, they began to see advantage in an association with the Russian Orthodox Church. As a Christian minority in a Muslim country, they would always count for something in the eyes of the Christian great powers, but practical help was only likely to come from neighbouring Russia, and their wellbeing would be of considerably greater interest to the Russians if they became members of the Russian national Church. The desirability of a closer association with the Russian Orthodox Church was highlighted in the early 1880s, when the Nestorians of Urmia declined to support a major Kurdish revolt against Persian rule. The rebellion was crushed in 1882, and the defeated Kurds swore to take their revenge on the Nestorians sooner or later.

Increasingly aware of their precarious position, the Persian Nestorians again sought Russian help. An unsuccessful approach was made by a group of Armenians and Nestorians to the Russian consul at Tabriz in 1882, and in 1897 the sole remaining Nestorian bishop in the Urmia plain, Mar Yonan of Supurghan, went to Saint Petersburg to declare that he and his flock would convert to Orthodoxy in return for Russian help and support. In response to this overture the Russian Church sent several priests and monks on a fact-finding mission to Urmia in May 1897. Expecting to make a handful of converts at best, the Russians were astonished to be greeted by Mar Yonan and an enthusiastic crowd several thousands strong, and made rash promises of Russian intervention in the region. More than 10,000 Nestorian villagers signed a petition expressing their desire to join the Russian Orthodox Church. The petition spoke of the desirability of reuniting the Christian Church after fourteen centuries of division, but a Nestorian priest frankly admitted that he would accept 'whichever Church wielded the biggest club'.

Mar Yonan of Supurghan was admitted into the Russian Church, and a Russian mission was sent to Urmia in the autumn of 1898. By 1900 the Russians had built an Orthodox church in Urmia and set up a system of parishes and schools. Although the initial Russian penetration was confined to the diocese of

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Supurghan, a second Orthodox bishop was soon consecrated for the district of Tergawar, demonstrating that Russian ambitions encompassed the conversion of the entire Syrian population of the Urmia plain. Among the other foreign missions in Urmia it was generally expected that the Nestorians would before long be entirely absorbed by the Russians. The American minister in Teheran advised the American missionaries to leave, as he believed that the Russian missionaries would soon be followed by Russian troops, but the Americans decided to stay on, though with little hope for the future. The Anglicans moved their headquarters to Van in 1903, and three years later to the village of Bebadî near 'Amadiya, hoping that useful work could still be done in Turkey. The move from Urmia marked the end of the mission's influence. Although Anglican missionaries continued to minister at Serai d'Mahmidai and the other remote Nestorian villages in the Taimar region east of Van until they were recalled after the outbreak of war in 1914, they were too few and too far from the patriarch and his advisers to be effective.

Meanwhile, some of the Nestorians of Persia reconsidered their position in the wake of the Russian defeat by Japan in 1905, and in the same year a congregation left the Russian Orthodox Church to join the United Lutheran Church, which at that time had only a single missionary in Urmia. This defection revived hope in the Protestant world, and in the last years before the outbreak of the First World War a large number of missions from various Protestant groups in the United States and Europe were established in Urmia. Swedish and German Lutherans, English Plymouth Brethren and Congregationalists, American Dunkards, Holiness Methodists and Southern and Northern Baptists competed for influence with the Russian missionaries. They were joined by a number of Catholic missions also, and it has been estimated that nowhere else in the world were there so many rival Christian missionary groups at work than in Urmia at the beginning of the twentieth century.

However, the loss of prestige after the Russo-Japanese War and the defection of some of their new converts proved to be only a temporary setback to the Russian advance. The disorders which followed the 1906 Persian revolution led to the Russian occupation of Azerbaijan in 1909. The Russian military presence in and around Urmia provided welcome security for its Christian population, and strengthened the appeal of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1912 Russian missionaries extended their activities to Tergawar, Sulduz and Salmas, and by 1914 all the old Nestorians of Persia, a large proportion of their Catholic counterparts, and a fourth or fifth of the Protestants had joined the Russian Church. Few of the Nestorian, Chaldean or Protestant converts took their profession of Orthodoxy seriously. In keeping with the opportunistic approach that they had always taken

towards the foreign missions, they had merely joined the Church that wielded the biggest club.

The Reign of Yohannan VIII Hormizd (1830–7). The Chaldean patriarch Yohannan VIII Hormizd (1830–7), secure in the knowledge that the Vatican's support had finally placed his authority beyond challenge, might have spent the final years of his reign making himself useful. A patriarch worthy of the name would have tried to win back the confidence of his truculent bishops, and would have thrown his full support behind the endeavours of the Catholic missionaries to win converts in the Nestorian villages around ʿAmadiya and ʿAqra. Characteristically, Yohannan Hormizd did nothing of the sort. He spent the last years of his life attempting to sidestep the Vatican's determination to abolish hereditary succession in the patriarchate of Babylon. Unwilling to see the line of Mosul patriarchs founded by Shemʿon IV Basidi in the fifteenth century come to an end with his death, he concluded a curious bargain with the Nestorian Church in an attempt to preserve the succession in his family. He ordained his nephew Mansur Sefaro a priest, and in 1834 sent him to the Nestorian patriarch Shemʿon XVII Abraham (1820–61), who consecrated him metropolitan of ʿAqra at a ceremony held in Urmia. The new metropolitan took the name Eliya, the traditional name of the Mosul patriarchs, and shortly afterwards abandoned the pretence of being a Nestorian and rejoined the Chaldean Church, keeping his episcopal rank. He was now nicely positioned to run for patriarch after Yohannan's death. The Vatican soon smoked out this miserable intrigue, and degraded Eliya to his former rank of priest. As a member of the old patriarchal family, Eliya continued to enjoy a degree of support in traditionalist quarters for several years, but his appeal gradually faded. In 1852 the Vatican was sufficiently sure of its ground to allow him to be consecrated for the diocese of ʿAqra, this time as a *bona fide* Chaldean bishop. Eliya served the Chaldean Church loyally as bishop of ʿAqra until his death in 1863, disappointing the hopes of the traditionalists.

Meanwhile, the long struggle between Yohannan Hormizd and Gabriel Dambo was resolved in unexpected circumstances. In March 1832 the Soran Kurds of Rawanduz raided the plains to the east of Mosul in revenge for the murder of a Kurdish chieftain by the Yezidis. Four years earlier Alqosh had lost 700 of its inhabitants in a plague, and the arrival of the Kurds in 1832 was a disaster almost as great. The Kurdish troops descended on Alqosh and massacred its citizens, apparently under the impression that their victims were Yezidis. Christian estimates of the death toll ranged from 272 to 367 dead. Seven priests were among the dead, and the patriarchal vicar Hnanishoʿ was killed in church while officiating at a service. The most important victim, however, was Gabriel

Dambo, who had recently returned from Rome. Alqosh itself was sacked, the survivors were robbed, and the famous tomb of Nahum was destroyed. Joseph Audo, metropolitan of 'Amadiya, was stripped and insulted, but was eventually able to persuade the Kurdish leader to halt the massacre, insisting that he and his fellow-victims were law-abiding 'Syrians', not Yezidis.

Despite the death of Yohannan Hormizd's chief rival, the feuds within the Chaldean Church continued to simmer throughout the 1830s. The monks of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, under their new superior Yohannan Gwera, showed the patriarch no more respect than they had under Gabriel Dambo, and the metropolitan Joseph Audo of 'Amadiya, who claimed jurisdiction over the monastery because it was in his diocese, encouraged them to withhold the dues demanded by Yohannan Hormizd. If the status of the monastery had not changed since the thirteenth century, when it paid its dues not to the patriarch but to the bishops of Beth Nuhadra, Joseph Audo had a point; but it is not now possible to determine the rights and wrongs of the dispute. At all events, Yohannan Hormizd retaliated by suspending Joseph Audo from his episcopal functions and also censuring several monks of the monastery. His opponents simply ignored these strictures, and news of the quarrel eventually reached Rome. In 1835 the Vatican, heartily sick of the constant disagreements between the patriarch and his bishops and monks, instructed the Latin bishop Jean-Baptiste Auvergne, apostolic vicar of Aleppo, to investigate the affairs of the Chaldean Church. Both parties temporarily fell into line to make a good impression on this important functionary, but the truce was soon broken. To Audo and Gwera's horror, the Vatican's apostolic visitor found in favour of Yohannan Hormizd. Gwera refused to accept his defeat, and travelled to Rome, accompanied by two of his monks, where he eventually obtained an audience with Pope Gregory XVI. He was given an extremely frosty reception. Although Gwera and his two companions were assured that their complaints against Yohannan Hormizd would be investigated, they were also censured for their disobedience. The message was clear: the Vatican would sustain Yohannan Hormizd against any attacks launched either by Joseph Audo or by Yohannan Gwera. In the Vatican's eyes, both men had discredited themselves by a record of rowdy opposition that went back more than two decades.

In 1837 Yohannan Hormizd's health began to fail, and it was clear that he had not long to live. The Vatican was determined to ensure that hereditary succession should play no part in the selection of the next Chaldean patriarch, and in a bull of September 1838 appointed the metropolitan Nicholas Zay'a of Salmas Yohannan's coadjutor with the right of succession. Zay'a was Persian by birth, from Khosrowa, and could therefore lay claim to the protection of the foreign consuls in Turkey. He had also been educated at the Propaganda, and it was hoped

that after Yohannan's death he would loyally implement Vatican policy. Yohannan, meanwhile, had died a few weeks earlier, on 16 August 1838. His family, which had supplied the Church of the East with fifteen patriarchs since the middle of the fifteenth century, now renounced its hereditary right of succession, but insisted on retaining the traditional title Abuna, 'patriarch', as a family name.

The Reign of Nicholas I Zay'a (1837–47). Joseph Audo and the other Chaldean metropolitans were angered that they had not been consulted in the choice of Yohannan Hormizd's successor, but at a meeting in the spring of 1839 were unable to agree on an alternative candidate. Meanwhile Zay'a retained the support of Laurent Trioche, and his succession was confirmed by the Vatican in April 1840. Unsurprisingly, Zay'a had difficulty in bringing his resentful bishops under control during his short reign. Like his predecessor, he was openly opposed by Joseph Audo and the turbulent monks of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, and would have closed down the monastery if he dared. Instead, he persuaded 45 elderly monks to retire, significantly reducing Audo's support. He was also helped by events. In 1842 Yohannan Gwera was killed in the wake of a devastating raid on the monastery by the Kurds of 'Amadiya. Gwera's death deprived Joseph Audo of one of his chief allies.

Early in 1843 an unpopular attempt by Zay'a to reform the church calendar provoked a movement to depose him in favour of the erstwhile Nestorian bishop Eliya Sefaro, who had attractive credentials as a member of the old patriarchal family. Already disciplined once by the Vatican, Eliya refused to let himself be used in this way, and the plotters turned instead to the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XVII Abraham, who had taken refuge in Mosul in the wake of the Tiyari massacre. The Anglican missionary George Percy Badger threw himself zestfully into these intrigues. This gave Zay'a his opportunity. He went to Constantinople and complained vigorously to senior Turkish officials about British interference in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. He was backed up by the French embassy, and the Turkish authorities issued a *firman* acknowledging him as the rightful patriarch. The Society of Lyons strengthened Zay'a's position by offering to pay an annual salary to the entire Chaldean episcopate. It was made clear to Badger by the Turkish authorities that his presence in the territories of the Ottoman Empire was no longer welcome, and he returned to England in disgrace. He later restored his reputation with the publication of *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, a splendid memoir of his eventful stay in Kurdistan.

On his return from Constantinople in 1845, Zay'a struck back at his opponents. With his encouragement, the monks of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd successfully laid claim to some properties near Alqosh that had fallen into

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the possession of the patriarchal family. The lawsuit drew in both the French and British consuls in Mosul, on opposite sides of the case. Za'ya's enemies retaliated by accusing him of embezzling church funds, which he had in fact used to restore the monastery of Mar Giwargis near Mosul. They also spread rumours, which even Badger admitted were baseless, of immoral conduct. In 1846 the Vatican summoned the patriarch to Rome so that these charges could be investigated. Zay'a regarded this summons as a personal affront. He angrily refused to go, returned to his native village of Khosrowa, and resigned the patriarchate. He remained in Khosrowa, sulking, until his death in 1855.

The Reign of Joseph VI Audo (1848–79). Nicholas I Zay'a was succeeded by Joseph Audo, formerly metropolitan of 'Amadiya, who was elected by a synod of Chaldean bishops at the end of 1847 and confirmed by Rome on 11 September 1848. Joseph showed himself to be as energetic and combative a patriarch as he had been a bishop. During his reign he took measures to improve the calibre of the Chaldean clergy and strengthen the episcopate and the monastic order, and mounted a successful campaign to spread the Catholic faith into the Nestorian districts around 'Amadiya and 'Aqra. A devout Catholic, who had been brought to the Catholic faith after reading Joseph II's *Book of the Polished Mirror*, he clashed on a number of occasions with the Vatican on questions of jurisdiction. He could also be high-handed in his own domains. The British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard was told in 1845 by a recent Catholic convert from one of the Nestorian villages of the Sapna valley that Audo, then metropolitan of 'Amadiya, had ordered Catholic devotional prints to be displayed in the local church, and had threatened any Nestorian who protested with a flogging from the Muslim authorities. Most of the Catholic missionaries working among the Nestorians would doubtless have disavowed such disgraceful methods, and Layard's informant may also have exaggerated his story for effect; but it is probably true that, where the Nestorians were concerned, Audo preferred force to persuasion.

Audo laid the foundations, with help from the Vatican, for the Chaldean Church to grow and flourish remarkably in the last decades before the First World War. He appreciated the crucial role an educated clergy could play both in consolidating the Catholic faith where it already existed and in bringing it to new hearers. Hitherto many of the Chaldean Church's bishops had been educated at the College of the Propaganda at Rome, and its priests had picked up what education they could from their bishops. Audo worked to reduce the Church's dependence on Rome, and to ensure that the Chaldean Church was able to train and educate its own clergy. In 1859, with financial assistance from the Vatican, he built the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences near Alqosh. This new

foundation quickly replaced Rabban Hormizd as the principal seminary of the Chaldean Church. He also established two other important centres for the education of Chaldean clergy at Mosul, the patriarchal seminary of Saint Peter in 1866 and the Syro-Chaldean seminary of Saint John, completed shortly after Audo's death in 1878. The Syro-Chaldean seminary, which trained priests for both the Chaldean and Syrian Catholic Churches, was under the direction of the Dominicans, while the patriarchal seminary was directed entirely by Chaldean clergy. Although a number of Chaldean priests continued to be trained at Rome or elsewhere, most of the bishops and priests of the Chaldean Church in the decades before the First World War came from one or other of these three centres founded in Audo's reign.

Despite Audo's energetic investment in the future of the Chaldean Church, his relations with the Vatican were often strained. An early sign of his independent attitude was given in June 1858, when he held a synod in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, whose validity was not recognised by Rome. In 1860 a far more serious clash occurred when the Malabar Catholics sent a delegation to Mosul to ask the patriarch to consecrate for them a bishop of their own rite. Despite the protests of the apostolic delegate at Mosul, Henri Amanton, Audo consecrated Thomas Rokos as patriarchal vicar of Basra and dispatched him to visit the Malabar Christians. Amanton thereupon censured the patriarch, and Audo defended his conduct in two encyclicals to the Chaldean clergy and faithful in December 1860 and January 1861. Audo was thereupon summoned to Rome to account for his actions, and in June 1861 was instructed to recall Rokos, to write a letter of apology to the Propaganda and to make an act of submission to the pope. He complied with the first and third demands, and was received in audience by Pope Pius IX in September 1861. He then issued a third encyclical from Rome, admitting that he had been wrong to challenge the Vatican's authority, and returned to Mosul in December 1861. Meanwhile Rokos, who had been excommunicated on the Vatican's orders by the apostolic vicar of Verapoly on his arrival in India, returned in failure to Baghdad in June 1862. Audo's submission should have ended the dispute with Rome, but further incidents in 1863 and 1864 embittered relations between the Vatican and the Chaldean patriarch. The Chaldean bishops Peter Mikha'il Bartatar of Seert and Eliya Mellus of 'Aqra, who resented Roman interference in the affairs of the Chaldean Church, engineered opportunities to assert their independence. Their behaviour was provocative, but instead of disavowing them Audo took their part. In the ensuing clashes with the Vatican he was again forced to give way. Animosity grew on both sides as a result of his ill-advised challenges to the Vatican's authority. Not without reason, Audo's behaviour was seen in Rome as insolent.

The Vatican thereafter took every opportunity to remind Audo of his position. In 1867 Giwargis Peter di Natale, metropolitan of Amid, died at Rome. The Propaganda invoked the papacy's old privilege in such cases of directly appointing his successor, and asked the patriarch to submit three suitable names after discussion with his bishops. Shortly afterwards the diocese of Mardin also fell vacant with the death of Ignatius Dashto in 1868, and the Propaganda insisted on appointing Dashto's successor also. Audo duly submitted a list of seven names, and was directed to consecrate Peter Timothy °Attar as metropolitan of Amid and Gabriel Farso as metropolitan of Mardin. He was also informed that the provisions of the ecclesiastical constitution *Reversurus* promulgated in July 1867 for the Armenian Church would in due course be applied to all the Eastern uniate Churches. In August 1869 the Vatican's rules for the election of bishops were applied to the Chaldean Church in the bull *Cum ecclesiastica disciplina*.

This was too much for Audo, and he refused to consecrate the bishops-designate of Amid and Mardin. He was summoned to Rome and, in January 1870, forced to consecrate them. He complained that Rome was infringing the rights of the Eastern patriarchs, and was particularly aggrieved that the Syrian, Maronite and Melkite patriarchs had not yet agreed to accept the provisions of the 1867 constitution. As a result he was warmly welcomed as a member of the party opposed to the doctrine of papal infallibility, and joined in the opposition to the controversial constitution *De ecclesia Christi*, absenting himself from the session at which it was promulgated. He then refused to adhere to this constitution, claiming that he could only take such a solemn step back home, among his own flock. He met the Sultan in Constantinople on 16 September 1870, and denounced the constitution as infringing the traditional customs of the Church and damaging the interests of the Ottoman Empire. He declared that he had not accepted its provisions, and never would. At the same time he celebrated mass with the Armenian priests who had separated themselves from the patriarch Hassoun, and refused to reply to letters from the Propaganda. The Vatican, alarmed, used every means at its disposal to recall him to obedience and head off a threatened schism. Finally, in July 1872, last of all the Eastern patriarchs, Audo wrote a letter accepting the decisions of the council. The Vatican decided to punish his presumption. In *Quae in patriarchatu*, a stinging encyclical of November 1872 addressed to the bishops, clergy and faithful of the Chaldean Church, Pope Pius IX rehearsed the many examples of Audo's intransigence, deplored his disobedience, and welcomed his eventual submission. Audo's flock was left in little doubt as to who, in the Vatican's eyes, had been in the wrong.

Audo clashed with the Vatican again in 1874. He asked Pope Pius IX to restore to the Chaldean Church the traditional jurisdiction of the Church of

the East over the Syrian Christians of India. The Vatican delayed its response to this request and Audo decided not to wait. He sent Eliya Mellus, bishop of ʿAqra, to India as a metropolitan, where he was promptly excommunicated by the Vatican. In May 1874 he consecrated the future patriarch Eliya Peter ʿAbulyonan metropolitan of Gazarta and Mattai Paul Shamina metropolitan of ʿAmadiya, without any consultation with the Vatican. In May 1875 he consecrated Quriacos Giwargis Goga metropolitan of Zakho and Philip Yaʿqob Abraham metropolitan for India, to assist Eliya Mellus. The pope threatened in an encyclical letter of September 1876 to excommunicate both the patriarch and the bishops whom he had consecrated unless they returned to obedience within 40 days. Audo yielded in March 1877, and wrote to recall Eliya Mellus and Philip Yaʿqob Abraham from India. He was absolved from censure and commended for his compliance in the papal letters *Solatio nobis fuit* (June 1877) and *Iucundum nobis* (July 1877), and his episcopal appointments outside India were recognised.

The historical record for the Chaldean Church in the middle decades of the nineteenth century is dominated by the clashes between the Vatican and the Chaldean patriarchs, and it is often easy to overlook the experience of ordinary Chaldeans at this period. Although the Chaldeans suffered nothing comparable to the massacres inflicted on the Nestorians of Tiwari and Tkhuma, daily life in a Muslim country could be just as hard for the Catholics as for the Nestorians. A series of manuscript colophons written by the priest and scribe David of Barzane provide a vivid impression of the hardships endured by a humble Chaldean clergyman in the mission field around ʿAqra while his betters were squabbling over precedence. David was born and raised in the ʿAqra village of Barzane, whose priest Hzairan died during a plague in 1827. In 1841, probably in his late teens, he began studying for the priesthood in ʿAinqawa, a large Chaldean village near Erbil. By 1844 he was a deacon, and in 1845 he was ordained a priest at Dohuk by Joseph Audo, who was then metropolitan of ʿAmadiya. Audo, whose fiery temper too often let him down after he became patriarch, took his responsibilities as a bishop very seriously; and during the next year and a half instructed David and two other newly-ordained priests in their pastoral duties during a gruelling tour of the villages of the Zakho district. The three young priests picked up the rudiments of canon law and church ritual from their bishop as they rode from village to village, but received little instruction in theology. At first the four men seldom stayed more than a few days in any one spot, but the hardships of life on the road gradually took their toll, and the three priests spent the last five months of their initiation in the Zakho village of Beidar. They were then sent back to their native villages to minister to their fellow-Chaldeans and to preach the Catholic faith to the Nestorians. Although there were now Chaldean majorities

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in the villages around ʿAmadiya, most of the villages of the ʿAqra region were still Nestorian in the 1840s, and the local Muslim authorities did not take kindly to Catholic missionaries stirring up trouble. During the 1850s and 1860s David suffered a harrowing series of personal tragedies. He was flogged in his native village of Barzane by the aghas of Zibar, ‘who did not allow even the children to weep’, and was moved by Audo to Khardes, a large Chaldean village whose population was treated with a little more circumspection by the local Muslim rulers. He stayed at Khardes for nine years, and during this time eight of his relatives died there. He moved on to the ʿAqra village of Kherpa, close to the site of the ruined monastery of Beth ʿAbe, where three more close relatives died. At nearby Sanaya d’Nahla he lost two of his children, and he and the other Christians were driven out of the village by the Muslims. He then left Zibar, abandoning all his possessions, and in 1863 ‘found peace’ in the village of Kanifalla. But his troubles were not over. His wife died there, and from then on he had to cook his own food and mend his own clothes. His sole surviving relative, his son Antun, died in August 1865, and was commemorated by his father in three laments. For the next two years the lonely priest indulged his grief in a series of elegies, in Syriac, Sureth and Kurdish. He is last heard of in 1871, when he copied a breviary for the ʿAqra village of Adeh. The date and circumstances of his death are not known.

The experiences of David of Barzane also highlighted the strenuous efforts made by Joseph Audo, first as a bishop and later when he became patriarch, to convert the Nestorians of the ʿAmadiya and ʿAqra regions to Catholicism. The success achieved by the Catholic missionaries in these regions during the middle decades of the nineteenth century owed much to Audo’s personal interest. He showed his mettle as metropolitan of ʿAmadiya, when he converted Daudiya and several other Nestorian villages in the Sapna valley to Catholicism during the 1830s and 1840s. The villages concerned had recently been plucked clean by the tax collectors of the governor of ʿAmadiya, and some of their demoralised inhabitants may have converted in the hope that the French and Italian missionaries would protect them against future exactions. By 1850, Chaldeans far outnumbered Nestorians in the Sapna valley. Audo was equally successful in the ʿAqra region, particularly after he strengthened his hierarchy by creating new Chaldean dioceses for ʿAqra and Zakho in the 1850s. With three Catholic bishops now working in the ʿAmadiya and ʿAqra regions, the Chaldean Church was able to bring over most of their Nestorian villages during the later years of Audo’s reign. On the eve of the First World War there were just over 12,000 Catholics in the Chaldean dioceses of ʿAmadiya and ʿAqra. Most of the 4,000 Nestorians recorded in these two dioceses were concentrated in the villages of Berwari, a hilly region to the north of ʿAmadiya which had only recently begun to attract the attentions

of the Catholic missionaries. Joseph Audo is now remembered chiefly for his obstreperous disagreements with the Vatican, and his zeal for the propagation of the Catholic faith among the Nestorians of ʿAmadiya and ʿAqra tends to be overlooked. It is pleasant to record that the Vatican did not entirely forget Audo's achievements. Audo died in March 1878, reconciled with Rome, and his obituary was pronounced some months later by Pope Leo XIII, who praised him as 'a man adorned with a fine sense of faith and belief.' Sadly, although there are no lack of sources for his eventful career, he has not yet found his biographer.

Chaldean Missionary Successes and Setbacks. Joseph VI Audo was succeeded by Eliya Peter ʿAbulyonan (1879–94), formerly metropolitan of Gazarta, who was elected in 1878 in the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences and confirmed by the Vatican in February 1879 under the title Eliya XII ʿAbulyonan. Strictly speaking, the new patriarch should have been called Eliya XIV, since his predecessors included the Nestorian patriarchs Eliya XII Denha and Eliya XIII Ishoʿyahb, but somebody in the Vatican either miscounted or dismissed two of the earlier Eliyas as illegitimate. Eliya XII's reign was largely spent in repairing relations with Rome and restoring harmony within the Chaldean Church after the excitements of his predecessor's reign, but he also laid the foundations for a remarkable burst of Catholic missionary activity in the final decades before the First World War. In 1882, in the most significant act of his patriarchate, he reopened the Syro-Chaldean Seminary of Saint John and the patriarchal Seminary of Saint Peter. Both seminaries had been completed during the final years of Joseph Audo's reign, but had been closed during the Malabar dispute. The new patriarch was also responsible for a number of building projects, including the restoration of the patriarchal cell in Mosul and the monastery of Mar Abraham the Mede near Batnaya and the construction of handsome new Chaldean churches in Baghdad and Cairo.

Eliya XII ʿAbulyonan was a vigorous supporter of the missionary role of the Chaldean Church, particularly among its benighted Nestorian neighbours. During his reign he launched a mission to the Nestorians of the Hakkari region. Intrepid Catholic missionaries, headed by the Chaldean monk Samuel Giamil and operating from the small town of Diza Gawar, not far from Kochanes, began to penetrate the remote Nestorian villages along the upper reaches of the Great Zab river. They were responding, as they thought, to an invitation from the Nestorian patriarch Shemʿon XVIII Rubil (1861–1903). Skilful at playing off the various foreign missionary groups against one another, the Nestorian patriarchs had long given the Catholics reason to believe that they would welcome their assistance. In 1861 the patriarch Shemʿon XVII Abraham had told his advisers

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on his deathbed, 'When, to save our nation, you have to change religion, unite with the Catholics and not the Protestants.' In the summer of 1890 his fatuous successor Shem'on XVIII Rubil let it be known that he was willing to consider joining the Chaldean Church if the terms were right. In October 1890 he was visited in Diza Gawar by the French Dominican missionary Jacques Rhétoré, who tried to sound out his intentions. Further contacts followed in 1891, and rumours began to spread that the Nestorian patriarch was on the point of converting to Catholicism. In September 1892, in the wake of a report that talks had begun between the Chaldean and Nestorian patriarchs, the Americans at Urmia took fright. The American missionary Frederick Coan hastened up to Kochanes, where he persuaded Shem'on to reconsider. It was not a difficult task. The patriarch complacently told Coan that he had quarrelled with some of his cousins, and had threatened to become a Catholic merely to spite them, as his conversion would deprive them of the benefits they could otherwise expect from their membership of the patriarchal family. At Coan's request, Shem'on broke off his discussions with the Chaldeans and failed to keep an appointment he had made some weeks earlier to meet Eliya XII 'Abulyonan in 'Amadiya. 'From now on, we are all Americans!' he lamented. In fact, no further American pressure was brought to bear upon the patriarch. In his own shallow, unreflective way, Shem'on XVIII Rubil continued to uphold the traditional faith of the Church of the East until his death in 1903.

Eliya XII 'Abulyonan died of typhoid fever in June 1894, and his body was buried in the church of Mart Meskinta in Mosul. His preferred successor, the metropolitan Gabriel Adamo of Kirkuk, refused to accept the nomination of the electoral synod, and the bishops turned instead to the metropolitan 'Abdisho' Khayyat of Amid. 'Abdisho' V Khayyat (1895–9) governed the Chaldean Church with the help of his brother Joseph Eliya, whom he appointed his patriarchal vicar, and his short reign was memorable for the first massacres of the Armenians. These events impinged particularly on the Chaldean archdiocese of Seert, whose archbishop from 1892 to 1900 was the future patriarch Emmanuel Thomas. Terrified by the slaughter of their Christian neighbours, the Chaldeans of the village of Kib became Muslims almost to a man. The Kurds invaded the vulnerable monastery of Mar Ya'qob the Recluse, destroyed its tombstones and ripped off the beautiful bindings from the books in its library. Emmanuel Thomas was eventually able to obtain a *firman* from the Porte and permission from the vali of Bidlis to build a new cathedral church in Seert itself, dedicated to the Holy Family.

'Abdisho' V Khayyat was succeeded by Emmanuel II Thomas, who was unanimously elected patriarch on 9 July 1900 and who remained patriarch of Babylon until his death in 1947. In the early years of Emmanuel's reign the

Chaldean Church made a determined effort to preach the Catholic faith among the Nestorians. Although they had earlier failed with the patriarch Shem'on XVIII Rubil, the Catholics were more successful with his ambitious brother Nimrod, who was prepared to work for the success of Chaldean missions in the Nestorian territories to weaken Shem'on's authority and pave the way for his own elevation as patriarch. In 1898 he allowed a Dominican missionary to settle in his own village, Khananis, where he began to make converts to Catholicism. From this bridgehead Catholic efforts developed in the following years into a sustained effort to win converts among the Nestorians of the Hakkari mountains. Catholic missionaries ventured into villages never before exposed to their teachings and, like the Protestant missionaries, won acceptance by opening schools and providing free education. Unsympathetic observers, among them the Anglican missionaries, attacked this approach as tantamount to bribery, but there is no reason to suppose that the Catholics behaved with any less sincerity than their rivals. The results, however, were much the same. A few genuine conversions were made, but most of the humble 'Syrians' who attended the Catholic services and sent their children to the Catholic schools took what the missionaries offered and gave little in return.

At first the Catholic effort appeared to prosper, and early reports were optimistic in tone. Although negotiations were still underway in many villages, reporters were not slow to predict the imminent return of the entire Nestorian Church to the Catholic faith. A letter to Pope Leo XIII in 1899 from the apostolic delegate Henri Altmayer claimed, preposterously, that as many as 50,000 Nestorians had already converted, and there were plans to consecrate Abraham Shem'onaya, the *natar kursya* of the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XVIII Rubil, as Chaldean bishop for Hakkari. In this climate of triumphalism the newly-consecrated Chaldean patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas was given the title *Delegatus ad Nestorianos* by the Vatican in a decree of July 1902, and was empowered to admit to the Catholic communion any bishop or priest who converted. In 1903 the Catholics achieved a striking success with the conversion of Nimrod and some other members of the patriarchal family. Almost as importantly, they brought over the Nestorian bishop Isho'yahb of Berwari and a number of villagers from his diocese. In a well-publicised ceremony in Mosul, these influential converts were welcomed into the Chaldean Church by its patriarch. In fact, although not realised at the time, this victory marked the high point of Catholic success.

The mass conversions confidently predicted in early reports from the Catholic mission field never materialised. The Catholic missionaries and teachers, perhaps 40 men and women at most, had to contend with a powerful opposition party in the Nestorian Church supported by the Anglican and Russian missionaries. Shem'on XVIII Rubil died in 1903, and his opponents demonstrated their power

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by engineering the succession of his young nephew Shem'on XIX Benjamin in place of the *natar kurya* Abraham Shem'onaya. Also, like the Anglicans and American Presbyterians before them, the Catholic missionaries could not offer the Nestorians the material aid, weapons and security they really wanted. The scale of conversions was therefore measured in hundreds rather than in tens of thousands. Ashitha, the largest, most prestigious and most accessible Nestorian village, was a particular target for the Catholic missionaries, but despite their best efforts only 350 villagers are recorded as Chaldeans in 1913, about a fifth of its population. Progress was equally disappointing elsewhere. Only a few hundred Chaldean converts were made in Baz and Julamerk. They were placed under the jurisdiction of the Chaldean bishops of Gazarta and Van respectively. By 1914, though enthusiasts still spoke of tens of thousands of converts, more reliable Catholic sources showed a total of only 4,000 converts in Hakkari and slightly under 8,000 in the villages of the Urmia plain.

There were also losses to offset these minor successes. The Young Turk revolution in 1908 weakened the hold of the Chaldean bishops over their congregations. Many humble Chaldeans living in the villages of the Mosul plain preferred the old ways, and were Catholics not from genuine conviction but merely because the Chaldean Church, backed by France, offered greater security than the Nestorian Church. The revolution promised better treatment for the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, and this prospect tempted a number of Chaldeans in Alqosh to go over to the Nestorians. The Anglican mission, based in the nearby village of Bebedi since 1908, helped to educate the converts, and the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XIX Benjamin provided them with a bishop from the old patriarchal family, Eliya Abuna. Although the civil authorities, at the request of the Chaldean hierarchy, prevented the new bishop from taking up residence in Alqosh in 1910, the schism was not healed, and a disconsolate Nestorian enclave remained at Alqosh until it disappeared in the disorders of the First World War.

In the decade before the First World War the Nestorians also regained a following in India as a result of a schism in the Syro-Malabar Church. As usual, the schism was prompted by the wish of the Indian Christians concerned to return to their traditional dependence on one of the Syriac-speaking Churches. In this particular case, the Nestorian patriarch seized an opportunity that his Chaldean counterpart was too obedient to exploit. Although Joseph Audo did not shrink from challenging the Vatican's jurisdiction over the Chaldean communities in India, his successors were less adventurous. In 1860, in response to an appeal four years earlier from a restive section of the Syro-Malabar Church, Audo sent his patriarchal vicar Thomas Rokos to India. In 1874 Audo again offended

the Vatican, this time by dispatching Eliya Mellus to India. Mellus was able to establish an independent Chaldean hierarchy at Trichur. In 1882 the Indian priest Antony Thondanatta, who had been consecrated a bishop at Kochanes in 1862 under the name 'Abdisho', returned to India, and in 1885 succeeded Mellus as metropolitan of the so-called 'Syro-Chaldean Church' of Trichur. Like Rokos and Mellus, 'Abdisho' was a Catholic, and his consecration at Kochanes made no difference to his theological beliefs. He died in 1900, and on past form the Trichur Christians might reasonably have expected to receive another bishop from the Chaldean Church. However, the Chaldean patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas (1900–47) was rather more respectful of the Vatican's claims than his predecessors had been, and declined to consecrate a successor. The Trichur Christians, with their habitual indifference to theological labels, turned instead to the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XIX Benjamin, who sent them a Nestorian metropolitan, Abimalek Timothy, in 1908. The Chaldeans of Trichur forthwith abandoned their Catholicism and enthusiastically welcomed their new metropolitan. The 'Chaldean Syrian Church' of Trichur, as it is now confusingly called, has been Nestorian since 1908, and is the only one of the numerous Saint Thomas Churches to have revived its ancient connection with the Church of the East.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

The Nestorian Church. Reports made in the 1830s and 1840s by the English and American missionaries mentioned at least fourteen dioceses in the Kochanes patriarchate. The villages along the upper course of the Great Zab between Ashitha and Kochanes, together with a number of outlying Nestorian communities, were grouped into a diocese under the direct control of the patriarch. There was another diocese in the Shemsdin district, administered by the *mutran* Hnanisho'. There were also dioceses for Berwari, Gawar and Jilu, whose bishops sat in the villages of Dure, Gagoran and Matha d'Mar Zay'a respectively. In the 1840s there was also a short-lived diocese of 'Aqra and Zibar, whose metropolitan Abraham resided in the village of Nerem. The Gazarta district had a metropolitan, Joseph, who had been obliged to withdraw to the monastery of Isaac of Nineveh near Shakh, where he died in 1846, and in 1850 there were two other Nestorian bishops in the Atel district, Shem'on and Thomas, who resided respectively in the villages of Shakh and Gweri Atel. In 1877 the *mutran* Joseph Hnanisho' had three suffragan bishops, probably all consecrated some years earlier, responsible for a number of villages in Shemsdin and Tergawar: Denha of Tis, Yohannan of Tuleki and Sabrisho' of Gawar.

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There were also four dioceses in the Urmia region, whose bishops (Yohannan, Joseph, Gabriel and Eliya) resided respectively at Gawilan and ʿAda in the Anzel district and Ardishai and Geogtapa in the Baranduz district. A fifth bishop, Abraham, resided in the village of ʿArmutaghaj until his death in 1833, and was also responsible for a number of villages in the Tergawar district. The diocese of Mar Yohannan included the Anzel district and the outlying Nestorian village of ʿUla near Salmas, while the somewhat larger diocese of Mar Gabriel to its south included the city of Urmia and the villages of the Baranduz and Sulduz districts. While both these dioceses contained numerous villages, and appear to have been of some antiquity, the other two Persian bishops were responsible only for the large villages where they sat, and their dioceses may also, like the *mutran*'s suffragan dioceses, have been created *ad personam*. By this period the bishops of the historic dioceses regularly took a distinctive name (Hnanishoʿ of Shemsdin, Ishoʿyahb or Yahballaha of Berwari, Sargis of Jilu, Sliba of Gawar, Yohannan of Anzel and Gabriel of Ardishai), and these dioceses were clearly felt to be different from the *ad personam* dioceses in the Shemsdin and Urmia districts which existed by their side.

The Urmia dioceses of ʿAda and Geogtapa lapsed after the death of their bishops, while a new diocese was established for the large Anzel village of Supurghan in 1874, whose bishop Yonan joined the Russian Orthodox Church in 1896. The elderly bishop Ishoʿyahb of Berwari died probably not long after 1850, and by 1868 the Berwari district had three bishops: the deceased bishop's *natar kursya* Ishoʿyahb and Yahballaha and a third bishop, Yonan, who resided in the village of ʿAqri. Yahballaha died between 1877 and 1884. During the 1870s and 1880s the European and American missionaries sighted the occasional Nestorian bishop in the hills behind Gazarta, but the last few Nestorian villages in the Gazarta region were being squeezed both by the Chaldeans and the American Presbyterians, and their bishops were by now an endangered species. A Nestorian metropolitan named Joseph, who resided in the village of Shakh, close to the celebrated monastery of Mar Isaac of Nineveh, joined the American Presbyterians in the 1870s, but in 1884 was back in the Kochanes hierarchy. He then disappears from history, and his ultimate allegiance is not known. A few years later, in 1896, the young Nestorian bishop Joseph Thomas Kasristo of Gweri Atel converted to Catholicism and joined the Chaldean Church. These renegades aside, the Kochanes hierarchy at the end of the 1880s contained twelve bishops, nine from the Hakkari mountains and three from the Urmia plain: the *mutran* Isaac Hnanishoʿ, who had been consecrated after the death of his predecessor Joseph in 1884; the *natar kursya* Abraham Shemʿonaya, consecrated in 1883; the bishops Sargis of Jilu and

Sliba of Gawar; the *mutran*'s suffragans Denha of Tis, Yohannan of Tuleki and Sabrisho^c of Gawar; the bishops Isho'yahb of Dure and Yonan of 'Aqri in the Berwari district; and the Persian bishops Gabriel of Ardishai, Yohannan of Anzel and Yonan of Supurghan.

The diocese of Anzel effectively ceased to exist after its metropolitan Yohannan emigrated to Britain in 1881, and the other historic Urmia diocese, Ardishai, came to an end with the murder of its bishop Gabriel in 1896. The bishop Yonan of Supurghan died in 1908, and in 1913 the Urmia district had three Syrian bishops: the Russian Orthodox bishop Eliya of Tergawar and the Nestorian bishops Denha of Tis, who was appointed bishop of Sulduz in 1909, and Ephrem of Urmia. There were also several changes in the Hakkari district in the final decades before the outbreak of the First World War. The *natar kursya* Abraham Shem'onaya converted to Catholicism in 1903 and soon afterwards became a Chaldean bishop. The bishop Sliba of Gawar fled to Yerevan shortly before 1892 and did not return to his diocese, and the bishop Yohannan of Tuleki died shortly before 1911. In the Berwari district Isho'yahb of Dure, after a brief flirtation with the Chaldean Church, was replaced in 1907 by a turbulent young hothead named Yalda Yahballaha. The bishop Eliya Abuna was consecrated for Alqosh in 1908, but was prevented by the Turkish authorities from proceeding to his diocese, and was sent instead to administer the Nestorian villages of the Taimar district. Compared with the twelve bishops mentioned by Maclean, Browne and Riley in the 1880s, the Kochanes hierarchy on the eve of the First World War consisted of at most eight bishops: the *mutran* Isaac Hnanisho^c of Shemsdin; the bishops Yalda Yahballaha of Berwari, Zay^ca Sargis of Jilu, Denha of Sulduz and Ephrem of Urmia; the metropolitan Abimalek Timothy, consecrated for the Saint Thomas Christians of Malabar in December 1907; and, if they were still alive, the bishops Sabrisho^c of Gawar, last mentioned in 1901, and Yonan of 'Aqri, last mentioned in 1903.

The first reasonably scientific population estimates of the Kochanes patriarchate were made in the nineteenth century, but because in most cases the data recorded not individuals but families (defined normally as six, but occasionally as few as five or as many as ten individuals), attempts to extrapolate a total in terms of individuals could vary markedly. In the 1830s Eli Smith estimated the Nestorian population of the Hakkari region (apparently excluding the Bohtan and Shemsdin districts) at 10,000 families (60,000 individuals), with a further 25,000 Nestorians and Chaldeans living in the Urmia and Salmas regions. In 1850 Badger calculated the population of the Kochanes patriarchate at 11,378 families, or about 70,000 individuals, of whom 21,000 lived in the tribal territories. He was unable to supply detailed information on the Shemsdin and Urmia districts, but

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estimated that there were about 23 villages in the Bohtan district, and supplied the names of 222 villages in the other dioceses.

Table 1: Population of the Nestorian Church, 1850

<i>Diocese</i>	<i>Villages</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Priests</i>	<i>Families</i>
Patriarch's	100	75	62	2,778
Jilu	43	37	24	1979
Gawar	45	34	18	1,082
Berwari	27	20	18	348
Bohtan	23	23	16	220
Zibar	15	13	9	249
Shemsdin/Urmia	-	38	34	4,500
Lewun/Norduz	15	9	7	222
<i>Total</i>	-	249	188	11,378

Badger's figures are usefully complemented by the statistics provided by Edward Cutts in 1877. Cutt's statistics did not include the Nestorian villages in the Zibar, Berwari and Bohtan districts mentioned by Badger, but gave detailed figures for the villages of the Shemsdin and Tergawar districts and the Urmia plain, for which Badger had no reliable information. In his figures for the Urmia region Cutts distinguished between the villages of the Baranduz and Sulduz districts, and his figures for the Sulduz district, rarely visited by the European and American missionaries, represent almost the only surviving testimony to its neglected Nestorian communities.

Table 2: Population of the Nestorian Church, 1877

<i>Diocese</i>	<i>Villages</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Priests</i>	<i>Families</i>
Patriarch's	96	88	81	2,274
Jilu	21	38	37	1,650
Gawar	74	56	43	1,497
Shemsdin	57	43	36	1,067
Anzel	34	23	22	972
Supurghan	3	2	1	290
Ardishai	90	40	28	2,888
<i>Total</i>	375	290	248	10,638

The statistics published by Badger and Cutts, although more than twenty years apart, broadly agree where they overlap, and the 1877 statistics are also in line with

the statistics compiled in 1862 by Sophoniah for the Urmia district. Sophoniah's estimate of 4,050 Nestorian families in the Urmia district in 1862 is very close to Cutt's figure of 4,150 families in 1877. Given the broad agreement of these three separate sources, a rough estimate of the total population of the Kochanes patriarchate in 1877 can be made by adding Badger's statistics for the dioceses of Berwari and Bohtan in 1842 to Cutt's figures for the other dioceses, giving a total of just over 11,000 families, or between 80,000 and 100,000 individuals, living in around 425 villages. With 248 priests, a ratio of roughly one priest for every 400 believers, the Kochanes patriarchate could not serve its congregations as effectively as the Chaldean Church, and nearly half its villages (admittedly the smaller ones) did not have priests of their own.

The population of the Kochanes patriarchate (including the Urmia communities which temporarily converted to Russian Orthodoxy) seems to have risen appreciably in the decades before the First World War. A number of contemporary estimates were made, ranging from as low as 18,000 to as high as 190,000, with the majority of estimates falling somewhere between 70,000 to 150,000, and informed opinion favouring a figure of about 100,000. In 1913 the Chaldean priest Joseph Tfinkdji, who probably rounded down in doubtful cases, estimated that there were around 60,000 Nestorians living in Turkey and 30,000 in Persia. The evidence of two surveys of 1900 and 1914 suggests that the true population of the Kochanes patriarchate may have been slightly higher. The provincial government of Van estimated that there were just over 97,000 Syrian Christians in the *sanjak* of Hakkari in 1900, and the Chaldean priest Benjamin Kaldani estimated the Nestorian and Chaldean population of the Urmia region at 6,155 families, about 30,000 individuals, in 1914. The 1900 official statistics probably include several thousand Chaldeans, and Kaldani's figures include a number of Chaldean villages in the Salmas district. Allowing for the necessary deductions, the total population of the Kochanes patriarchate on the eve of the First World War may have been between 100,000 and 120,000. If so, it was still slightly larger than the Chaldean Church, but the gap was narrowing.

The Chaldean Church. The suppression of the Amid patriarchate in 1830 and the union of the Chaldean dioceses under Yohannan VIII Hormizd gave the Chaldean Church a hierarchy of eight dioceses: Amid, Mardin, Seert, Gazarta, Mosul, 'Amadiya, Kirkuk and Salmas. Thereafter, the task for the Catholics was to consolidate their position in the border districts (Gazarta, 'Amadiya and 'Aqra), many of whose villages were still Nestorian and wished to remain so. During the 1830s and 1840s the metropolitan Joseph Audo of 'Amadiya converted a number of Nestorian villages in the Sapna valley and the 'Aqra region to Catholicism.

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Several villages in the Gazarta and ʿAqra districts refused to convert, abandoning their traditional loyalty to the Mosul patriarchate and going over to the Kochanes patriarch Shemʿon XVII Abraham, but the Chaldean Church craftily appointed Eliya Sefaro, a member of the old patriarchal family, bishop of ʿAqra in 1852. Eliya's appeal to traditionalists, coupled with the establishment of the Chaldean diocese of Zakho in 1851, turned the tide. Despite the internal turbulence of the reigns of Nicholas Zayʿa and Joseph Audo, the Chaldean Church slowly but surely extended its influence into the outlying villages of the Kochanes patriarchate. In the final decades before the First World War Chaldean missionaries won over most of the remaining Nestorian villages around ʿAqra, purged the Zakho and Dohuk districts of Nestorian influence, and began making inroads into the villages of the Berwari region. Further to the northwest, the Catholic population of the archdioceses of Seert and Gazarta also rose appreciably, as Catholic missionaries made converts in the surviving Nestorian villages in the Tigris plain and the Bohtan valley. In the Urmia plain, Catholic missionaries operating from the Chaldean stronghold of Salmas made nearly 8,000 converts in villages that had been loyal to the Kochanes patriarchs for centuries. Although some Chaldeans went over to the Nestorians, particularly at Alqosh, and although Catholic attempts to infiltrate the Nestorian heartland in the Hakkari mountains achieved only limited success, the balance of attrition in this battle for hearts, minds and souls was firmly in favour of the Chaldeans. In 1913, thanks to the commitment of its missionaries, the Chaldean Church was almost as large as the Nestorian Church. It had come a long way since Sulaqa's consecration in 1553.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the membership of the Chaldean Church rose from around 50,000 to just over 100,000. This steady growth was reflected in the foundation of several new dioceses: Zakho in 1851, ʿAqra in 1852, Sehna (a town near Kermanshah in Persian Kurdistan, with a small, isolated Chaldean population first attested in the eighteenth century) in 1853, the archdiocese of Urmia in 1890, and the diocese of Van in 1902. The first reliable population statistics for the Chaldean Church, produced in 1867 by Paulin Martin, placed its membership at just over 70,000. In 1896 Jean-Baptiste Chabot estimated its membership at just under 79,000. Chabot's figures included the small, peripheral Chaldean communities in Adana, Aleppo, Basra, Beirut, Cairo, Constantinople, Damascus, Kermanshah and Teheran, which were under the care of patriarchal vicars. They also included the Chaldean population of the recently-established archdiocese of Urmia, and the Chaldean converts who lived in the Nestorian villages in the Kochanes patriarchate. These peripheral communities (2,000 in the vicariates, 6,000 in the archdiocese of Urmia and 1,800 in the mission stations) accounted for around an eighth of the total Chaldean population.

The last prewar survey of the Chaldean Church was made in 1913 by the Chaldean priest Joseph T'finkdji, after a period of steady growth since 1896. The Chaldean Church on the eve of the First World War consisted of the patriarchal archdiocese of Mosul and Baghdad, four other archdioceses (Amid, Kirkuk, Seert and Urmia), and eight dioceses (‘Amadiya, ‘Aqra, Gazarta, Mardin, Salmas, Sehna, Van and Zakho). The Church also had on its books two former Nestorian bishops who had seen the light, Isho‘yahb of Berwari and Joseph Thomas Kasristo of Gweri Atel. Three more patriarchal vicariates had been established since 1896 (Ahwaz, Ashshar and Deir al-Zor), giving a total of twelve vicariates. T'finkdji's grand total of 101,610 Catholics in 199 villages is slightly exaggerated, as his figures included 2,310 nominal Catholics in twenty-one ‘newly-converted’ or ‘semi-Nestorian’ villages in the dioceses of Amid, Seert, and ‘Aqra, but it is clear that the Chaldean Church had grown significantly since 1896. With a membership of around 100,000 in 1913, it was only slightly smaller than the Nestorian Church (which had probably 120,000 members at most, including the population of the nominally Russian Orthodox villages of the Urmia plain). Its congregations were concentrated in far fewer villages than those of the Kochanes patriarchate, and with 296 priests, a ratio of roughly three priests for every thousand believers, it was rather more effectively served by its clergy. Only about twenty Chaldean villages, mostly in the archdiocese of Seert, did not have their own priests in 1913.

Table 3: Population of the Chaldean Church, 1913

<i>Diocese</i>	<i>Villages</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Priests</i>	<i>Believers</i>
Mosul	13	22	56	39,460
Amid	9	5	12	4,180
Kirkuk	9	9	19	5,840
Seert	37	31	21	5,380
Urmia	21	13	43	7,800
‘Aqra	19	10	16	2,390
‘Amadiya	17	10	19	4,970
Gazarta	17	11	17	6,400
Mardin	6	1	6	1,670
Salmas	12	12	24	10,460
Sehna	1	2	3	900
Van	10	6	32	3,850
Zakho	15	17	13	4,880
Vicariates	13	4	15	3,430
<i>Total</i>	199	153	296	101,610

MONASTICISM

The Alqosh Monasteries. Gabriel Dambo had hoped to turn the monastery of Rabban Hormizd into a seminary for the Chaldean Church. This vision was partially realised during the reigns of Yohannan VIII Hormizd and Nicholas I Zay^ʿa, but the continual feuding between the patriarch and the monks diverted energies unproductively. The climate improved considerably under Zay^ʿa's successor Joseph VI Audo, himself one of Dambo's monks. As metropolitan of ʿAmadiya in the 1830s, Audo had converted the villages of the Sapna valley to Catholicism, but only after personally educating his priests in the mission field. This experience convinced him that Dambo had been on the right track, and when he became patriarch in 1848 he did his best to turn Dambo's vision into a reality.

The monastery of Rabban Hormizd, which had been pillaged by the Kurds in 1842, was too exposed to serve as a seminary, and had also become the symbol of a turbulent time best forgotten. Audo decided to replace it, and in 1859, with financial assistance from the Vatican, built a new monastery of Notre Dame des Semences in a safer and more convenient site near Alqosh. Although the monastery of Rabban Hormizd continued to function, it did so on a much smaller scale than under Gabriel Dambo, and Notre Dame des Semences quickly replaced it as the principal seminary of the Chaldean Church. In 1896, according to Chabot, the monastic order of Saint Hormisdas consisted of the superior-general and four assistants, 32 priests, and 33 lay monks. Most of its members were monks of the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences, though some were resident in the monasteries of Mar Giwargis and Rabban Hormizd. Many others were serving as priests in the towns and villages of the patriarchate of Babylon. Twenty-six of the 61 priests in the patriarchal archdiocese of Mosul and 5 of the 15 priests in the diocese of Zakho were monks. At that time the Chaldean Church had a total of 248 priests. If roughly the same proportions were observed elsewhere, perhaps 80 Chaldean priests, or a third of the total number, were monks of the order of Saint Hormisdas.

Other Monastic Centres. Although the monasteries of Rabban Hormizd and Notre Dame des Semences were the two principal Chaldean monasteries, they were not the only ones. The long-abandoned monastery of Mar Ya^ʿqob near the village of Qashafir in the Dohuk district was reopened in 1847 as a summer station for the Dominican mission. Limited use was also made of the monastery of Mar Giwargis near Telkepe and the monastery of Mar Ya^ʿqob the Recluse near Seert, whose precious library was exploited so effectively by the Chaldean archbishop Addai Scher in the years before the First World War. One of Addai Scher's predecessors,

the archbishop Peter Mikha'il Bartatar, reopened the deserted monastery of Mar Guriya in the Seert district and used it as his episcopal residence between 1878 and 1884. Elsewhere, however, there were humiliating losses for the Chaldeans. The abandoned monastery of Mar Awgin near Nisibis, which was briefly reoccupied by one of Yohannan Gwera's monks in 1838, was appropriated by the Jacobites in 1842. For the next seven decades, until it was definitively abandoned during the massacres of 1915, it was the seat of the bishops of the revived Jacobite diocese of Nisibis. The 'Great Monastery' of Abraham of Kashkar on Mount Izla, the source and inspiration for Nestorian monasticism during the Sasanian period, also fell into the hands of the Syrian Orthodox Church during the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, monasticism had almost ceased to exist among the Nestorians. Austen Henry Layard, who visited the Tkhuma district in 1845, several months before it was invaded by the Kurds, mentioned that 'a misshapen and decrepit nun' was living in the vestibule of the church of Beth Arijai, there being no regular monasteries left in the Kochanes patriarchate. He saw no other nuns or monks on his travels, and of the several dozen scribes known from the Kochanes patriarchate since the schism of 1552, only one, the nineteenth-century solitary Rabban Yonan, described himself as a monk. Yonan, a deacon from a priestly family that had originated in Erbil but had long ago moved to the village of Mazra'a in the Tkhuma district, lived the life of a solitary monk, and copied a number of manuscripts in the 1860s and 1870s. With his turban and his long white beard, he looked the part, and was lionised by Cutts and the other Protestant missionaries. His death in 1886 marked the end of a centuries-old monastic tradition in the Nestorian branch of the Church of the East.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Catholic Literature and Scholarship. The nineteenth century was the golden age of European scholarship on the Church of the East. Catholic and Protestant missionaries working in the Nestorian and Chaldean villages of northern Mesopotamia encouraged their Syrian helpers to translate key texts that shed light on the Church's history and theology. This work continues to underpin modern Western scholarship on the Syriac-speaking Churches. The Catholics, who had access to the great libraries of the Chaldean Church, inevitably produced the most valuable work. The outstanding achievements of this period include an edition of the *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus by Jean-Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy (1877, with a Latin translation); a monumental edition in seven volumes of the lives of the Persian saints and martyrs by the Chaldean priest Paul

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Bedjan of Khosrowa (1891); an edition of Mari, ʿAmr and Sliba's histories of the Nestorian patriarchs by Enrico Gismondi (1896–9, with a Latin translation); editions of Hasan Bar Bahlul's massive Syriac lexicon (1886–1901) and the letters of the patriarch Ishoʿyahb III (1904, with a Latin translation) by Rubens Duval; an edition of the acts of the Nestorian synods between the fifth and eighth centuries by J B Chabot (*Synodicon Orientale*, 1902, with a French translation); an edition of the anonymous seventh-century *Khuzistan Chronicle* by Ignazio Guidi (1903, with a Latin translation); an edition of the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, a Syriac copy of a lost Greek treatise by Nestorius, by Paul Bedjan (1910, with a French translation); and an edition of the *Chronicle of Seert* by Addai Scher (1910–19, with a French translation). The *Bazaar of Heracleides*, a work composed by Nestorius shortly before his death, in which he argued that his enemies had maliciously misrepresented his position, caused a considerable stir when it was published, as it demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that Nestorius himself was not a Nestorian. This proud record of achievement was marred with the publication, by Alphonse Mingana, of the *Chronicle of Erbil* (1907, with a French translation). Better, perhaps, if that contested work had never seen the light of day.

The first scientific histories of the Church of the East were written during this period. The pioneer in this regard was the French missionary Jérôme Labourt, whose *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse*, published in 1904, remains to this day the best account of the history of the Nestorian Church in the Sasanian period. Labourt submitted the early centuries of the Church's history to a piercing analysis, and demonstrated that many of the traditions so dear to the faithful were merely legends. His conclusions, although undoubtedly correct, shocked many pious Nestorians and Chaldeans, and were strenuously resisted in some quarters. Many modern Assyrian and Chaldean Christians remain in denial, and these hoary old myths are still repeated a century after Labourt first exposed them for what they were. But in the scholarly world, Labourt's work transformed the study of the Church of the East. One of the best contemporary Chaldean scholars, the archbishop Addai Scher, published another critical history of the Church of the East in French and Arabic in 1913, the *Histoire de la Chaldée et de l'Assyrie* (in Arabic, *Tarikh Kaldû wa Athûr*). Two influential histories in English, also dependent on Labourt, were published on the eve of the First World War, de Lacy O'Leary's *The Syrian Church and Fathers* (1909) and Wigram's *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church* (1910). Unfortunately, while all three authors were as sceptical as Labourt of most of the traditions that had hitherto passed for history, they were taken in by the factitious glamour of the recently-published *Chronicle of Erbil*. As a result, their reconstructions of the early Persian Church were sadly flawed. Labourt's

masterpiece, which preceded the appearance of the *Chronicle of Erbil* by three years, escaped its contamination and has consequently retained its value.

The Catholic scholars also helped to elucidate the chequered history of the Chaldean Church since its foundation, in controversial circumstances, in 1553. Four of the most important works written in this period were *Genuinae Relationes inter Sedem Apostolicam et Assyriorum Orientalium seu Chaldaeorum Ecclesiam* (1902), an edition of the correspondence of the Nestorian and Chaldean patriarchs with the Vatican since the schism of 1552 by Samuel Giamil, a Chaldean monk who rose to become superior-general of the Chaldean monasteries; Addai Scher's *Épisodes de l'histoire du Kurdistan* (1910), a study of a number of obscure texts that shed light on the history of the Church of the East in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; Maurice Brière's *Histoire du couvent de Rabban Hormizd de 1808 à 1832* (1910), a translation of a Syriac manuscript written shortly after the death of Gabriel Dambo by an unidentified monk of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, which gave an exhaustive, blow-by-blow account of the unedifying feud between Yohannan Hormizd and Joseph Audo; and *L'Église chaldéenne catholique autrefois et aujourd'hui* (1914), an extremely useful history of the Chaldean Church and its dioceses written by the Chaldean priest Joseph T'finkdji of Mardin.

All of these studies have their particular delights, but Brière's history of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd deserves a wider readership than it has so far won. Brière's narrative was clearly intended as a rebuttal of an autobiography published by Yohannan Hormizd shortly after he became patriarch of Babylon in 1830 (reproduced in part by George Percy Badger in *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*). Yohannan Hormizd twisted the truth outrageously in his autobiography, and his lies evoked an indignant rejoinder from one of Gabriel Dambo's monks, very probably Elisha^c of Dohuk, who became superior-general of the Chaldean monasteries on completion of the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences in 1859. Despite its inevitable *longeurs*, Brière's *History* contains some memorable scenes, including a description of a confrontation between the two protagonists in 1828 in which Audo told Yohannan Hormizd that he was 'not fit to be a deacon of the Kabbanaye, let alone patriarch.' (The Kabbanaye were a backward Chaldean community with proverbially low standards of discrimination.) The discontents of Yohannan Hormizd's reign have now faded into history, and this torrid monkish chronicle tends to be valued by modern scholars merely for the information it provides on Dambo's revival of monasticism. In fact, it should be read as an object lesson. No other text from this period better evokes the character of the dreary disputes that poisoned life in the Chaldean Church for more than two decades, or more clearly demonstrates how quickly individuals living in a closed community can lose all sense of proportion.

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Other important contributions to scholarship made at this period by Chaldean clerics include *Elementa linguae chaldaicae*, a Syriac grammar written in Latin and published at Rome in 1860 by the priest Joseph Guriel of Salmas; and the *Dictionnaire de la langue chaldéenne*, a two-volume Syriac dictionary written in 1897 by Thomas Audo, the Chaldean metropolitan of Urmia. Audo's dictionary has been reprinted more than once, and has retained its value to the present day. Some of the work done at this time was of very high quality, and the leading Chaldean scholars (Addai Scher, Paul Bedjan, Samuel Giamil and Thomas Audo) were deeply respected by their European counterparts. However, scholars of their calibre were rare, and some Chaldean writers were guilty of regrettable lapses of judgement. Guriel's otherwise valuable *Elementa linguae chaldaicae* was marred by the inclusion of a wildly inaccurate list of patriarchs of the Church of the East; while Joseph Tfinkdji could not resist the temptation to link the Chaldean diocese of Mardin (founded shortly after the schism of 1552) with the thirteenth-century diocese of Maiperqat, whose title included Mardin, bridging the gap by listing half a dozen fictitious fourteenth- and fifteenth-century bishops of Mardin whose names he claimed to have found in an old manuscript.

However, the Chaldean Church atoned for the dishonesty or naivety of some of its scholars by its vital contribution to the preservation of the Church of the East's heritage. During the nineteenth century the monks of the monasteries of Rabban Hormizd and Notre Dame des Semences copied hundreds of precious manuscripts, often at the request of European patrons. This demanding labour was initially undertaken by the monks of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, but the torch was passed to their counterparts in the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences in the final decades before the outbreak of the First World War. While the lion's share of the work was done in the two Alqosh monasteries, where the old books which inspired the copying industry were kept, Mosul and Telkepe also remained important scribal centres. The most productive Telkepe scribe, the deacon Francis Mara, copied at least thirty-two manuscripts between 1872 and 1894. The emergence of these centres to some extent eroded the traditional dominance of Alqosh, but the village remained an important scribal centre up to and beyond the First World War, and members of the Shikwana and Nasro families continued to copy manuscripts in the village into the twentieth century, though in smaller numbers than previously. The most prolific Chaldean scribe in the second half of the nineteenth century was the deacon 'Isa, son of Isha'ya, from the village of Eqrar in the Zakho district, who copied at least seventy-three manuscripts between 1854 and 1898, first in Mosul and later in Alqosh.

Protestant Literature and Scholarship. Although the Protestant missionaries did not enjoy quite so easy access to the manuscripts of Alqosh and the monastery of Rabban Hormizd as their Catholic counterparts, comparable treasures, if not to the same extent, could be found in the Nestorian churches of the Urmia region. The great achievements of the Protestant scholars include an edition of Eliya bar Shinaya's *Chronography* by E W Brooks (1910, with a Latin translation) and editions and English translations by E A Wallis Budge of Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors* (1893), Shlemun of Akhlat's *Book of the Bee* (1896), the *Histories* of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar 'Idta (1902) and the fourteenth-century *History of Rabban Sawma and Mark*, published under the title *The Monks of Kublai Khan* (1928).

Besides hunting for key texts for translation into the European languages and cataloguing the manuscripts of the Urmia and Hakkari regions, the Protestant missionaries also rendered a great service to modern scholarship by writing their memoirs of their work among the Nestorians of the Hakkari mountains and the Urmia plain. These memoirs were written primarily to win support back in Europe and America for the missions to the Nestorians, and most of them contain lively, interesting and well-informed descriptions of the nineteenth-century Nestorians, their worship and their way of life. In the light of the tragedy of 1915, which uprooted the Nestorians of the Kochanes patriarchate from the villages where they had lived for centuries, these books are now of considerable historical value. The most notable memoirs were William Francis Ainsworth's *An Account of a Visit to the Chaldeans* (1841), George Percy Badger's *The Nestorians and Their Rituals* (1853), Edward Cutts' *Christians under the Crescent in Asia* (1877), Athelstan Riley's *Narrative of a Visit to the Assyrian Christians* (1888) and *Progress and Prospects of the Archbishop's Mission* (1889), Arthur Maclean and William Browne's *The Catholicos of the East and His People* (1892), and William Ainger Wigram's *The Cradle of Mankind* (1914). The best books by the Americans were Eli Smith and Harrison Dwight's *Researches in Armenia* (1840), Asahel Grant's *The Nestorians, or the Lost Tribes* (1841)—a curious tract in which the author argued, dottily, that the Nestorians were descended from the lost tribes of Israel—and Justin Perkins' *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia* (1843) and *Missionary Life in Persia* (1861). A number of nineteenth-century European travellers unconnected with the Anglican and American missions also recorded their impressions of the Nestorians. The best of these accounts are Justin Sheil's *Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Kurdistan* (1838), Austen Henry Layard's *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (1853), in which the celebrated British archaeologist gave a detailed description of an excursion to the Nestorian villages of the 'Amadiya and Hakkari regions, and Isabella Bird's *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (1891), whose sharp impressions of

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life at Kochanes during the reign of the patriarch Shemʿon XVIII Rubil are of exceptional interest. Other, less well-known accounts include the narrative of the Austrian traveller Anna Hafner Forneris, who visited the Urmia region in 1840 and described how a Nestorian priest and his parishioners rounded off a church service by drinking themselves into a stupor with the communion wine. Angered by the contempt shown by the Turkish and Persian governments for their Christian minorities, these European and American observers roundly criticised the brutality, incompetence and corruption of Ottoman and Persian administration. For this, of course, they have been charged by some squeamish modern scholars with flagrant Orientalism. It might be worth considering an alternative possibility, that they were merely reporting what they saw.

Justin Perkins, the first head of the American mission, was also responsible, almost single-handedly, for creating a thriving vernacular literature in the Urmia dialect of spoken Syriac. Two centuries earlier Israel of Alqosh and Joseph of Telkepe had composed poetry in the spoken dialect of Alqosh, known as Sureth or Fellihi, but thanks to the energy of the Americans the Urmia dialect quickly replaced it in the nineteenth century as the standard medium for literary composition in Syriac. The challenges facing Perkins were formidable, as many of the Nestorians of the Urmia region were unable to read or write. One or two of the better-educated Nestorian priests had occasionally exercised their pens before the advent of the Americans—the priest Saba of the isolated Nestorian village of Ula in the Salmas district composed a stirring *Polemic against the Roman Church* at the end of the eighteenth century—but such paragons were few and far between. With the help of the bishop Yohannan of Anzel and a number of literate Nestorian priests and deacons, Perkins first established the grammar of the Urmia dialect and then mounted a vigorous campaign against illiteracy among the region's Christians. Between 1849 and 1915 the American missionaries published the journal *Zahrir d'babra* ('Rays of Light'), to encourage the Nestorians to rediscover their history and traditions. Most of the content was provided by the missionaries themselves, and native authors only began to emerge in the twentieth century. 'Rays of Light' spawned a number of rivals. In 1896 the Catholic Lazarist mission, which had been working in the Urmia region since 1840, attempted to trump it with *Qala d'sbrara* ('The Voice of Truth'), and in 1904 the Russian Orthodox missionaries weighed in with *Urmi artadokseta* ('Orthodox Urmia'). These three journals reflected the Christian concerns of their originators, but in 1906 they were joined by a fourth journal, *Kochba* ('The Star'), a forum for the emergent Assyrian nationalist movement. Its appearance was a depressing sign of things to come.

Manuscript Collections and Catalogues. Catholic and Protestant scholars alike pored over the rich manuscript collections of the Chaldean Church and the lesser treasures of the Kochanes patriarchate. During the nineteenth century the great museums of Europe and the United States sent their agents to Kurdistan to buy up Syriac and Arabic manuscripts from the Nestorians and Chaldeans, and these purchases formed the basis for the magnificent collections now held in London, Cambridge, Paris, Berlin, Rome, New York, Saint Petersburg and a score of other cities. The Vatican, of course, had begun to acquire Syriac and Christian Arabic manuscripts as early as the sixteenth century, and its collection had been catalogued by the Assemani brothers in 1758, but such collections were relatively rare until the nineteenth century. The activities of the nineteenth-century collectors at last made it possible for European scholars to study the literary heritage of the Church of the East properly. In recent years Edward Said and other influential opinion-formers have railed against such acts of cultural appropriation, overlooking the fact that few Syrians in the 1880s, when the great collections were acquired, were interested in old manuscripts. In most cases they were happy to sell them, or to make copies of particularly valuable finds. Many of the manuscripts lovingly assembled in these European and American collections would have perished in the First World War if they had remained in Kurdistan. Since these great manuscript collections have informed all subsequent Western scholarship on the Nestorians, and since this scholarship has in turn helped to publicise the history and achievements of the Church of the East, it is surely for the best that they found their way to their present homes. It is not impossible that Nestorian and Chaldean Christianity will eventually be reduced to insignificance in their historic homelands in Iraq and Iran. If such a tragedy occurs, at least the literary heritage of the Church of the East will remain substantially intact.

Western scholars also took the lead in cataloguing the major holdings of Syriac and Christian Arabic manuscripts. Early works included catalogues of the Vatican's collection of Middle Eastern manuscripts by A Maius (1831), the Syriac and Christian Arabic manuscripts in the British Museum by F A Rosen and J Forshall (1838), and the Syriac manuscripts in the *Bibliothèque nationale* in Paris by H Zotenberg (1874). In 1872 William Wright published a massive catalogue of more than a thousand Syriac manuscripts acquired by the British Museum since 1838, and in 1901 catalogued the Syriac manuscripts in Cambridge. In 1894 he exploited his hard-won expertise to write *A Short History of Syriac Literature*, the first work of its kind in English. A further 250 manuscripts in the British Museum were catalogued in 1899 by G Margoliouth. Work also began on cataloguing the surviving manuscript collections in northern Mesopotamia. Addai Scher, archbishop of Seert and perhaps the most outstanding scholar produced by the

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Chaldean Church in the nineteenth century, spent much of the decade before the outbreak of war in 1914 cataloguing the manuscript collections of the Chaldean dioceses of Amid, Mardin and Seert, and also the holdings of the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences near Alqosh, which had inherited much of the library of the neighbouring monastery of Rabban Hormizd.

Studies of the Nestorian Missions in China. The nineteenth century saw the gradual growth of scholarly interest in the Nestorian missions to China in the T'ang and the Yuan dynasties. Most of the evidence was assembled by Colonel Henry Yule in 1866 in his *Cathay and the Way Thither*. This influential book, which conveniently assembled a multitude of scattered references from a wide variety of sources, was updated in 1913 by the French sinologist Henri Cordier, and continues to underpin the best recent scholarship on the Nestorians in China. Scholars also subjected the Sian Tablet to serious scientific study. The first reasonably accurate translations of its long Chinese inscription appeared, both in French and English. In France, the pioneers in this respect were Guillaume Pauthier, whose *L'inscription syro-chinoise de Si-Ngan-Fou* appeared in 1858, and Henri Havret, who published a three-volume translation and commentary on the Sian Tablet inscription between 1885 and 1902 (*La stèle chrétienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*). The renowned British sinologist James Legge, whose ground-breaking translations of the Chinese classics still hold the field, published an English translation in 1888 (*The Nestorian Monument of Hsi-An-Fu*) with an unusually perceptive commentary. This period also saw the emergence of a scholarly consensus that the Sian Tablet was indeed a genuine product of the T'ang dynasty. In 1855, a powerful defence of the Tablet's authenticity was made by the British missionary and sinologist Alexander Wylie, which did much to swing the balance against the sceptics. A few years later the French scholars Ernest Renan and Stanislas Julien, who had earlier asserted that the inscription was a modern forgery, swallowed their pride and admitted that it might be genuine after all. These two developments were key steps in the Sian Tablet's rehabilitation. Doubts were finally stilled in the 1890s, with the publication of Havret's authoritative study.

In 1907 the Danish adventurer Frits Holm took this interest to its logical conclusion. Holm, a journalist by profession, visited Sian in September 1907 and offered to buy the tablet. The offer was refused, but Holm's persistence alarmed the Chinese authorities. In October they removed the tablet from the field where it had stood since its discovery in 1625 to the safety of the Pei-lin museum in Sian. Holm quickly dropped any plans he might have had for smuggling the tablet out of China, and instead had an exact replica of the tablet made in Sian. The replica, which like the original weighed two tons, was transported with the utmost

9—*The Age of the European Missions (1831–1913)*

difficulty by cart to the nearest railway station, 350 miles away. It left Shanghai in February 1908 and was displayed in June 1908 in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, ultimately finding its way to the Vatican. After the First World War a rumour began to spread that Holm had intended to steal the Sian Tablet, and in 1928 the Danish journalist told his side of the story in an entertaining memoir, *My Nestorian Adventure in China*. He wrote fluently and persuasively, and his account of his adventures in 1908 almost convinces the reader that his intentions had been honourable.

Chapter Ten
THE CALAMITOUS TWENTIETH CENTURY
(1914–2011)

OVERVIEW

After several decades of peaceful growth under European tutelage during the second half of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century was a disaster for the Church of the East. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 pitted Muslim Turkey against Christian Russia, and initial Turkish reverses on the battlefield kindled hopes of liberation among the Christian minority in the Ottoman Empire. In 1915, a year still commemorated by Assyrian Christians as the 'year of the sword' (*shanta d'sayfa*), the Turks and their Kurdish auxiliaries struck against the Christian minority in several eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire threatened by the advancing Russians, slaughtering several hundred thousand Armenian Christians. The Turks made no distinction between Armenians and Syrians. They also killed tens of thousands of Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic and Chaldean Christians, and drove the remainder from their villages in the Tur 'Abdin and the Amid, Seert and Gazarta regions. The Chaldean settlements around 'Amadiya, Mosul, Erbil and Kirkuk in northern Iraq, and in Baghdad and Basra in southern Iraq, far from the front line in Armenia, remained untouched by the violence. The Nestorians of the Hakkari region, who were also largely unaffected by this dreadful onslaught, foolishly declared war on the Ottoman Empire in May 1915. The Turks immediately invaded Hakkari and drove the Christian tribesmen across the frontier to Salmas, in the Urmia region of Persia, whose Christian population had been attacked earlier in the wake of a rare Turkish victory against the Russians. Russia's withdrawal from the war in 1917 swung the balance in Turkey's favour, and in the summer of 1918 the Turks drove the Nestorians and Chaldeans from Urmia too, putting an end to more than a millennium of uninterrupted Christian settlement in the Hakkari and Urmia regions. Thousands of Christian refugees fled southwards to seek shelter with the advancing British forces in Hamadan. Not since the fourteenth century had the Church of the East suffered a disaster of such magnitude. Estimates of the total number of Christian deaths at this period vary wildly, and have also been deliberately exaggerated by Assyrian

nationalists, who have claimed the massacres of 1915 to 1918 as a genocide. A careful study of the available evidence, district by district and village by village, suggests that around 40,000 Nestorians and 15,000 Chaldeans perished during the First World War at the hands of the Turks, out of a total pre-war population of around 120,000 Nestorians and 101,000 Chaldeans.

The history of the Church of the East since the disaster of the First World War has been a bleak one. For most of the interwar period tens of thousands of Nestorian Christians from the Hakkari and Urmia regions lived under British protection in refugee camps in Iraq. Attempts to return to their homelands in Turkey failed, and while the Urmia Christians resettled some of the villages of the Urmia plain in the 1920s and 1930s, they did so only in small numbers. Many of the refugees remained permanently in Iraq, and eventually became Iraqi citizens. Others emigrated, to Syria and Lebanon, and to Europe, America and Australia. Life in Iraq and Iran was relatively peaceful for the Christian minority during the middle decades of the twentieth century, but conditions deteriorated sharply in the final years of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. The turmoil of the last two decades has spurred an exodus of Nestorian and Chaldean Christians from the villages of northern Iraq to the large cities, further weakening the few remaining links with the past, and has also swelled the ranks of the emigrant communities.

The Nestorian and Chaldean Churches now have more members among their diaspora than they do in their historic homelands in Iraq and Iran, and these diaspora communities are gradually developing their own distinctive traditions. Significantly, a bishop recently appointed for the Nestorian diocese of California was born in the United States, not in Iraq or Iran. He is likely to be followed by other bishops whose outlook is shaped by the experience of diaspora life. While the Nestorian and Chaldean diasporas are a welcome guarantee that the historic Church of the East will survive in one form or other, their existence is gradually leaching the life out of the remaining Christian communities in Iraq and Iran. If law and order is eventually restored in Iraq, and if a stable government emerges from the chaos of the past decade, some of the emigrants may return to their old homes. If not, the decisions that shape the future of the Church of the East will increasingly be taken in California, not Mosul, and Nestorian and Chaldean Christianity may eventually be reduced to insignificance in their historic homelands.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Assyrian Identity. So far, this study has spoken of 'Nestorians' and 'Chaldeans'. By the end of the nineteenth century, a new and surprising identity was making

its presence felt. One of the most remarkable aspects of the twentieth-century history of the Church of the East has been the growth of a strident Assyrian nationalism. Its promoters claim that the native Christians of Iraq and Iran are descended from the ancient Assyrians. This preposterous claim succeeded beyond its authors' expectations, and most Nestorian Christians now think of themselves as Assyrians. Histories of the 'Assyrian nation' now start with Ashur I and the Assyrians of the Old Testament, skate rapidly over the thin ice between the collapse of the Assyrian Empire and the start of the Christian era, and reach firm ground again with the well-attested history of the Church of the East. The Nestorian branch of the Church of the East has officially styled itself the 'Assyrian Church of the East'.

The claim to descent from the ancient Assyrians was first seriously made at the end of the nineteenth century. The Christians living around Mosul always knew that they were living in what had once been Assyria, because the Bible (particularly the Book of Jonah) told them so. For several centuries there had been a Nestorian diocese of Nineveh, and the Nestorian metropolitans of Mosul styled themselves metropolitans of 'Athor', the Syriac name for Assyria. The anonymous sixth-century author of the fictitious *Acts of Mar Qardagh*, who obviously knew his Old Testament, ingeniously exploited this Assyrian connection by claiming his upper-class hero as a descendant of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. But it did not occur to any Nestorian Christian before the end of the nineteenth century to regard himself as an Assyrian. All this changed with the excavation of the ruins of Nineveh by Austen Henry Layard in the 1840s. Layard's spectacular discoveries made the ancient Assyrians fashionable. In 1881 the authorities of the Church of England decided to call their mission to the Nestorians 'The Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to Assyrian Christians' because nobody had heard of the Nestorians but everyone knew about the Assyrians. In turn, this first, official use of 'Assyrian' did much to popularise the term among the Nestorians themselves. They were quick to appreciate the fact that they enjoyed far higher visibility as 'Assyrians' than as Nestorians. By the end of the First World War the term 'Assyrian' was in widespread use, and was regularly used in the diplomatic exchanges of the 1920s. Wigram's book *The Assyrians and Their Neighbours* (1929) further entrenched the term. The result, in the 1920s and 1930s, was a vogue for Assyrian Christian names. A male child might still be called Odisho ('Abdisho') or Dinkha (Denha), but as often as not he would have a brother named Sargon or a sister named Semiramis.

The claim that the native Christians of Iraq and Iran are descended from the ancient Assyrians is a travesty of the truth. No doubt some Christians from the Mosul district are indeed descended from the Assyrians. But far more are

descended from Jews, Arameans, Nabateans, Medes, Parthians, Persians, Kurds and Arabs, not to mention Greek and Syrian deportees from the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The native Christian population of Iraq and Iran is thoroughly mongrel, and has been for centuries. Not only were the Nestorians and Chaldeans not Assyrians in any real sense, but they had never, throughout the recorded history of the Church of the East, thought of themselves as such. The names of thousands of Nestorian and Chaldean bishops, priests, deacons and scribes between the third and nineteenth centuries are known, and there is not a Sennacherib or Ashurbanipal among them. Yet within a generation or two, the Assyrian nationalists succeeded in persuading many Nestorian Christians that they were indeed Assyrians. They were able to pull off this remarkable fraud by shamelessly rewriting history, the tactic always employed by nationalists in the face of inconvenient facts.

One of the most awkward facts facing the Assyrian nationalists was that the Nestorians and Chaldeans had never spoken of themselves as Assyrians. For most of their history they had called themselves *Suryaye* or *Suraye*, ‘Syrians’. As late as 1918 they were still describing themselves as ‘the Syrian nation’ (*mellat Suryeta*). The nationalists, with a show of scholarship, invoked a technical philological argument in support of their case. Syriac, it was said, had a tendency to drop an initial vowel in certain circumstances. Whether they knew it or not, their ancestors had not in fact been calling themselves *Suraye*, ‘Syrians’ at all, but rather *Assuraye*, ‘Assyrians’. They had just been misquoted. This absurd but ingenious argument, which contradicted the plain sense of hundreds of texts spanning nearly two millennia, convinced many doubters. Some scholars timidly raised objections, pointing out that the Assyrians had always been called *Athoraye* in Syriac, not *Assuraye*; but they were shouted down by the nationalists.

Emboldened by success, the nationalists have attempted to widen the application of the term ‘Assyrian’ to embrace the Chaldeans, the Jacobites and Syrian Catholics—the traditional enemies of the Nestorians—and even the Maronites of Lebanon. At times, particularly during Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, even the Ethiopians have been claimed as fellow-Assyrians. At present, confusingly, the term ‘Assyrian’ is used sometimes in a denominational sense and sometimes in an ethnic sense. Its most common usage is to denote a member of the Assyrian Church of the East, in which it functions as a convenient euphemism for ‘Nestorian’. It is also used as a synonym for ‘East Syrian’, embracing both Nestorians and Chaldeans. Finally, it can denote members of any or all of the Syriac-speaking Churches, including the Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic and Maronite Churches, although few Chaldeans have agreed to be redesignated ‘Assyrians’ and even fewer Jacobites, Syrian Catholics and Maronites. The result

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has been a bewildering multiplication of terms. Syriac, the language in which the great literature of the Church of the East was composed, ceases to be Syriac after the fourteenth century. The modern Syriac dialects of Urmia and Alqosh are no further apart than most regional dialects, but because the former dialect is predominantly spoken by Assyrians and the latter by Chaldeans, they have been claimed as separate dialects and grandly rechristened 'Assyrian neo-Aramaic' and 'Chaldean neo-Aramaic' respectively.

Nestorians and Chaldeans in the First World War. The adoption by the Nestorians of their new Assyrian identity was hastened by the disasters they suffered in the First World War (1914–18). Turkey, initially neutral, joined the Central Powers in November 1914 in the hope of regaining territory lost to her old enemy Russia and reversing the verdict of the recent Balkan Wars. The main Turkish effort was made against the Russians, and the threat of a Russian invasion gave the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, including the regions largely inhabited by Assyrian Christians, a tragic strategic significance. The Turks launched a major offensive in December 1914 around Sarikamish in northwest Persia. Their frontal attacks on the main Russian positions were decisively repulsed, and the atrocious campaigning conditions in the bitterly-cold winter of 1914 took a catastrophic toll of the ill-clad Turkish forces. The Turks had more success in the east. Fearing that a Turkish breakthrough at Sarikamish would cut their communications, the Russians pulled their forces back from northern Persia in January 1915, enabling the Turks to advance and occupy Tabriz and most of Azerbaijan.

The Russian retreat from Persia left the Assyrians of the Urmia and Salmas regions at the mercy of the Turkish forces, which included a large number of Kurdish irregulars. The prosperous farming villages of the Urmia plain offered particularly promising prospects of loot, and most of them were abandoned by their owners before the invaders arrived. More than 150 Nestorian villagers were killed by the Kurds in the villages of Gulpashan and Charbash, whose bodies were later buried by the American missionaries. The predominantly Chaldean community in Dilman, about 800 strong, was massacred when the town fell to the Turks. Some of the Chaldeans were offered their lives if they converted to Islam, and were killed when they refused. Eyewitnesses noted that Muslim villagers joined in the looting, and that while most of the killing was done by the Kurdish irregulars, regular Turkish officers made no effort to stop them.

Warned by the fate of those who had stayed put, about 10,000 Assyrians fled northward on the heels of the retreating Russian army, while the remainder took refuge in the foreign missions in Urmia: 3,000 with the French Catholic mission and no fewer than 17,000 with the American mission. The twenty or so

American missionaries, led by Dr William Shedd, were equal to the emergency. In the two days which intervened between the Russian evacuation of Urmia and its occupation by the Turks they enlarged their mission yard by building new walls and blocking up existing street entrances. When the Turkish army occupied Urmia on 2 January 1915 they found the bulk of the city's Assyrian community safely sheltered within a single compound. Its only entrance was the original gateway into the mission yard, and above this gateway the flag of the neutral United States was prominently displayed. It was the American mission's finest hour.

The courage and determination of the American missionaries probably prevented a massacre of the Christian population of Urmia. President Woodrow Wilson warned the Turkish government against endangering American interests in the city, and fears that the Turks would assault the compound gradually subsided. Nevertheless, the Turks remained in Urmia for four months, and during their occupation the region's Assyrians suffered terribly. Many villagers had not taken shelter in the American mission, and were left at the mercy of the invaders. A number of them were shot, including the Nestorian bishop Denha of Sulduz. Furthermore, although the Turks did not attack the American mission compound, perhaps 4,000 Assyrian refugees died from typhoid sickness in the cramped and squalid conditions which soon prevailed inside.

A Russian counterattack in March 1915 ejected the invaders from Persian territory, and Urmia was evacuated by the Turks in May and reoccupied by the Russians shortly afterwards. The breathing space did not last long, however. In July the Turkish army, which had been strongly reinforced, again advanced into Persia. Again the Russians withdrew, and this time most of the Assyrians fled with them. As the second Russian retreat took place in summer, conditions were less atrocious than they had been in the January flight, but hundreds of Christian refugees still died of disease. It was not until late summer that the Assyrians of the Urmia region were able to return once more to their plundered villages.

Although the Russians had made little headway against the Turks in the Urmia region, their armies had greater success further to the west. Early in 1915, in the wake of their winter victory at Sarikamish, the Russians pressed on towards Van and Erzerum and the Turks were forced to retreat on Seert. Fearful of an uprising by the Armenian Christian minority, whose sympathies with the Russians were well known, the Turks organised a large-scale deportation of the Armenians in June 1915 to clear their potentially disloyal Christian subjects away from the districts threatened by the Russian advance. The deportations were accompanied by atrocities on a large scale, in which several hundred thousand Armenians are estimated to have died.

The Turks also attacked the region's Jacobite, Syrian Catholic and Chaldean communities, inflicting terrible losses on all three Churches. Christian communities

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were massacred in Bidlis and Adana, in Urfa (Edessa), and in Seert, Amid and Gazarta. Many Christians were flogged before being stabbed or shot to death, and in some cases the bodies were photographed adorned with turbans, the resulting photographs being circulated as evidence of Christian atrocities against Muslims. The massacres were particularly savage in the Amid and Seert regions, where every Chaldean village was destroyed. Among the victims was Addai Scher, the Chaldean metropolitan of Seert, who was arrested and shot by the Turks in the village of Tanze on 20 June 1915. Scher, a scholar of international reputation, is said to have spent the final hours before his arrest in a futile attempt to conceal the precious collection of manuscripts in the Chaldean monastery of Mar Ya'qob the Recluse near Seert. The monastery was pillaged by the Turks, and its famous library was destroyed. The Chaldean metropolitan Philip Ya'qob Abraham, who had been recalled from India by the Vatican in 1881 and transferred to the diocese of Gazarta, was also murdered by the Turks, as was the bishop Joseph Thomas Kasristo of Gweri Atel, a former Nestorian bishop who had joined the Chaldean Church in 1896. Contemporary observers estimated that 270,000 Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic and Chaldean Christians died during this period, but the true figure seems to have been around 70,000, of whom perhaps 10,000 were Chaldeans. Even at this lower figure, the scale of the losses was frightful. As the total Chaldean population of the dioceses of Amid, Mardin, Seert and Gazarta on the eve of the First World War was just under 18,000, the Chaldeans suffered almost as grievously, in proportion to their numbers, as the far larger Armenian community. Further north, the Nestorian and Chaldean villages in the Taimar district were also attacked along with those of their Armenian neighbours. Many of the villagers were killed, but the majority were able to escape westwards to an Armenian-controlled enclave around Van, where Aram Pasha and 15,000 Armenian troops beat off Kurdish and Turkish attacks until they were relieved by the arrival of Russian forces.

By the end of April 1915 Russian troops had penetrated the upper valley of the Great Zab in the Albaq district, and the Assyrians of the Hakkari region were forced to choose between remaining neutral or joining them. During the second half of 1914 the Turkish government had adopted a conciliatory tone towards the 'mountain Nestorians', mindful of their warlike reputation and strategic position, and the patriarch Shem'on XIX Benjamin had been assured by the governor of Van shortly before Turkey's entry into the war that the Assyrians had nothing to fear. Once the fighting began, however, the Turkish troops and their undisciplined Kurdish allies showed little restraint towards the Christians of the border regions. Nestorian villages in Albaq and Gawar were attacked and pillaged during the 1914 winter offensive. This experience persuaded most of

the Hakkari Assyrians that Turkish promises were worthless, and their suspicions of Turkish intentions were strengthened by the behaviour of the Turkish forces during their occupation of the Urmia region and by the first dreadful reports of the Armenian massacres. At the same time, the Russian advance offered the hope of final liberation from the Turkish yoke. Shemʿon XIX and most of his people were strongly in favour of abandoning their precarious neutrality. The patriarch's old opponent Nimrod, however, had little confidence in the Russian army and argued strongly against going to war against the Turks. The Turkish army was heavily committed elsewhere, he contended, and if the Assyrians remained neutral there was a good chance that the Turks would leave them in peace. As events would show, he was a better judge than the patriarch, but he was not allowed to dampen the prevailing martial enthusiasm. On 6 May, on the patriarch's orders, Nimrod and eight members of his family were denounced as traitors and murdered by Tiyari and Baz tribesmen. On 10 May, in an act of breathtaking folly, the Nestorian *maliks* unanimously voted to declare war on the Ottoman Empire. This disastrous decision brought down upon the Assyrians of Hakkari the full fury of the Turkish armies.

Shemʿon XIX's brother Hormizd, detained as a hostage at Mosul for the good behaviour of the patriarch, was immediately executed by the Turkish authorities, and in June 1915 the Turks took the offensive against the Assyrian villages in Hakkari. One Turkish column under the command of Haider Pasha of Mosul attacked from the south up the Great Zab valley. A second column of Kurdish irregulars advanced from the north into the Albaq district, hoping to cut off the Assyrian line of retreat. During their advance through Berwari and Hakkari the Turks and their Kurdish allies devastated the Nestorian villages in their path and looted their churches, including the famous sanctuaries of Mar Saba in Upper Tiyari, Mar Zayʿa in Jilu and the patriarchal church of Mar Shallita in Kochanes. The Assyrian tribesmen were badly outnumbered, and fought a number of rearguard actions in the Great Zab valley during the summer to buy time for their families and livestock to escape into the mountains. In October the pressure on their forces became irresistible, and their commanders decided to retreat into Persia. Their forces fell back to Qotranis and descended into the Albaq valley, destroying the bridges over the Great Zab as they went. In Albaq the Assyrian fighters rejoined their families, and in November the entire Assyrian population of Hakkari retreated eastwards over the mountains into the Salmas plain, where they threw themselves on the mercy of the Russians. The Kurds attempted to cut off this retreat, but were repelled by a heroic stand made by a flankguard under the command of the *malik* Ismaʿil of Lower Tiyari. The unexpected arrival in November 1915 of 50,000 hungry and ill-clad Assyrian refugees presented the

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Russian military authorities in Salmas with a humanitarian crisis. Food was in very short supply, and the Russians were forced to disperse the refugees among the cities of Bashqala, Salmas, Urmia and Khoi. The patriarch Shem'on XIX travelled to Tiflis in December 1915 to impress upon the Russian high command the desperate state of his people. As a result of his representations, around 15,000 Assyrians were permitted to settle in Armenia and Georgia, where their descendants still live today.

In 1916 the Russians advanced into Turkish Armenia, capturing Erzerum and Erzincan and establishing a front that ran from Trabzon on the Black Sea to Lake Van. Turkish forces in Persia were forced to retreat, and the Assyrians in the Urmia region were given a much-needed breathing space. In 1917, after earlier defeats at Gallipoli and Kut, the British began to put serious pressure on the Turks. General Edmund Allenby captured Jerusalem in December 1916, and in June 1917 Lawrence of Arabia entered Aqaba at the head of an Arab army. The front in Mesopotamia was also restored after the disaster at Kut. In March 1917 a British army under General Stanley Maude captured Baghdad. In September, Maude defeated the main Turkish army in Mesopotamia at Tagrit, midway between Baghdad and Mosul. Unfortunately for the Allies, these successes were largely undone by the collapse of Russia in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution. The new Bolshevik government desperately needed peace, and in March 1918 signed a treaty with the Central Powers that allowed Russia to pull out of the war in return for large cessions of territory to the Germans, Austrians and Turks.

The withdrawal of Russian troops from Turkey and Persia resulted in a period of turmoil in the Urmia region. There was an urgent need among the remaining Allies to raise local forces to prevent the advance of the Turks into Mesopotamia. The French, the British and the White Russians, who were all competing for influence over the local minorities, nominated the Assyrians to hold the Urmia region. The harsh occupation of the Russians, which had alienated the local Muslim population and created ill-feeling against all Christians, was nothing compared to the reign of terror now instituted by the local Christians, above all by the brutal Assyrian tribesmen from Jilu known in Iran as the 'Jelos'. The Christian levies were nominally under the control of White Russian officers, but in practice they acted as they liked, unrestrained by Shem'on XIX and increasingly under the control of the unsavoury warlord Agha Petros. Agha Petros, who had once served a jail sentence for fraud, was a confidence trickster of uncommon ability, who had persuaded the Vatican to award him a medal for his supposed services to Catholicism. This unlikely figure, recently hailed in an Assyrian biography as 'the Sennacherib of the twentieth century', supervised the creation of bloodthirsty tribal militias whose members spent most of their time pillaging the villages of

the Muslim Kurds and Azeris. Some Christians who had emigrated to the United States also took advantage of the situation to return and settle old scores with their former Muslim neighbours. To add to the chaos, famine and epidemics spread to Urmia, where starving bands of Kurdish refugees sought protection from their Christian oppressors. The Allied consuls based at Urmia frequently complained at the excesses of their Christian allies, but were unable to restrain them.

In February 1918 the desperate Muslim population of Urmia rose in revolt against the hated Christian occupiers. When the Muslim forces attacked, thousands of Christian tribesmen abandoned their depredations in the surrounding countryside and flocked to the town, where they easily overcame the Muslim resistance. Although a ceasefire was arranged by the Allies, the Jelos entered the town and slaughtered Muslim men, women and children in their thousands. Avid for plunder, and wary of starting a blood feud with the well-armed Kurds, the Jelos struck principally at Urmia's wealthier Persian and Azerbaijani residents. The Kurds, for their part, took advantage of the reign of disorder to steal what the Christians had overlooked. Their local leader was the agha Isma'il Simko, the head of the Shikak tribe. Simko seemed inclined to respond to a British appeal to join the Allied cause, and let it be known that he would be happy to consider an alliance with the Assyrians against the Turks. On 3 March 1918 the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XIX Benjamin, whose supremacy was under threat from Agha Petros, accepted an invitation from Simko to meet him in his residence in the village of Kohnashahr near Salmas to discuss the possibilities.

It was a fateful decision. Simko was in the pay of the Persian authorities in Tabriz, who were anxious to pay back the Assyrians for the sufferings inflicted by the Jelos. When the Assyrian delegation arrived in Kohnashahr they noticed that there were a number of men with rifles posted on the roof of Simko's house. Assuming that they were merely curious spectators, the patriarch and his companions went in without suspicion. They drank tea with the Kurdish leader and explained that they had no grudge against the Shikak Kurds, and were concerned only to defend themselves against the Turks. Simko appeared to accept these professions, and the meeting ended with expressions of mutual regard. Simko then escorted his guest to the front door of the house, and kissed his hand in token of farewell. The patriarch and his companions walked from the house into the front garden, where a single shot was fired by one of the guards. This shot was the signal for a fusillade from the riflemen on the roof. Within minutes Shem'on XIX and some forty-five of his bodyguards lay dead. The patriarch's body was tossed into a gutter by the Kurds, and was later recovered by an Armenian Christian and handed over to a search party of Tiyari and Tkhuma soldiers. The body was taken to Khosrowa and buried in the vault of the town's Armenian

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cathedral. The Nestorian bishop Eliya Abuna, the Chaldean bishop Peter ʿAziz and Khosrowa's Armenian priest officiated at the funeral service.

It was now the turn of the Assyrians to seek revenge. Their immediate response to Simko's treachery was to slaughter 500 Kurdish refugees in Urmia. In mid-March they organised an expedition under the command of Agha Petros to hunt Simko down. The Jelos located, engaged and defeated Simko's tribal levies, but failed to kill or capture Simko himself. The Kurdish leader escaped with part of his forces, and the frustrated Assyrians consoled themselves by burning a number of Kurdish villages and killing their inhabitants. Simko retaliated by ordering the massacre of 3,800 Armenian and Assyrian Christians in Khoi. Meanwhile, far from these excursions and alarms, in the precarious security of Christian-controlled Urmia, the murdered patriarch Shemʿon XIX Benjamin was succeeded on 29 March 1918 by his frail younger brother Paul. The 28-year-old Shemʿon XX Paul was consecrated in the ancient church of Mart Maryam by the *mutran* Isaac Hnanishoʿ and three other Nestorian bishops.

In spring 1918 the Turks advanced into Persian territory, encircling Urmia. The Christians attacked the Turks on 12 June in the hope of joining up with Armenian forces heading south towards Persian territory, but a week later their offensive crumbled in the face of a detachment of Kurdish cavalry near Salmas. On 18 July the Turks entered Urmia, and the city's surviving Muslims took their revenge on their former tormentors. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Christians were massacred in the wake of the Ottoman victory. At this point the beleaguered Assyrians decided to evacuate the Urmia plain. Perhaps 10,000 Assyrians headed for Russian territory, but the majority decided to march south and seek shelter with the nearest British forces. In the summer of 1918 the British advance in Mesopotamia had stalled around Mosul, but further to the east British troops under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Lionel Dunsterville—the model for Rudyard Kipling's resourceful schoolboy hero Stalky—had advanced through Persia and were now occupying Hamadan. Dunsterville's Persian campaign made escape to the south possible for the Assyrians. Around 70,000 Assyrian men, women and children made the gruelling march from Urmia to Hamadan. For the Hakkari Assyrians, the retreat was their second flight in three years; for the Urmia Assyrians, it meant the abandonment of their homes. The Assyrians took their livestock with them and as many of their possessions as they could. They were constantly harassed by the Kurdish tribes whose territory they traversed, and shortages of food and water caused grave hardships. Only around 50,000 Assyrians survived the trek and arrived safely in Mesopotamia. Their flight put an end to more than a millennium of uninterrupted Christian settlement in the Hakkari and Urmia regions. Few of the refugees, their newly-consecrated patriarch included, would

ever see their old homes again. The village of Kochanes, for three centuries the residence of the Nestorian patriarchs of the line founded in 1553 by Yohannan Sulaqa, would remain an uninhabited ruin for the rest of the twentieth century.

When the Assyrian refugees at last reached the British at Hamadan, a camp was established for them at Baquba on the River Diyala, about thirty miles northeast of Baghdad. There they were safe for the time being, and were relieved spectators of the collapse of Turkey in the final weeks of the war. In November 1918 the British flanked the Turks out of their defences around Mosul and entered the city in triumph. In Palestine General Allenby broke through the Turkish front at Megiddo. British cavalry poured through the breach and cut the Turkish line of retreat. The front collapsed, 75,000 prisoners were taken, and the British pressed on to Damascus and Aleppo. Nothing could be done to retrieve this disaster. Germany and Austria-Hungary were on the verge of defeat and the Allies had just knocked Bulgaria out of the war, placing Constantinople itself within their reach. Turkey had no choice but to capitulate. The Armistice of Mudros was signed on 30 October 1918 and Allied troops occupied strategic towns throughout Turkish territory.

For the Church of the East, the Turkish collapse came too late. The war had been an almost unmitigated disaster for both the Nestorians and the Chaldeans. The Nestorians of the Hakkari and Urmia regions had lost their ancestral homelands, and few of the survivors would ever see their old homes again. Their losses may have been as high as 40,000 out of a total pre-war population of 120,000. Although the southern dioceses of the Chaldean Church had not been touched by the fighting, the dioceses of Amid, Seert, Mardin, Gazarta, Van, Salmas and Urmia had been ruined, and perhaps 15,000 Chaldeans in these regions had either been slaughtered in the pogroms of 1915, killed in the fighting against the Turks and Kurds around Urmia, or died during the retreat of 1918. As jubilant crowds celebrated the end of the war in the streets of London, Paris and New York, tens of thousands of dazed Christian refugees, Nestorians and Chaldeans alike, huddled for shelter in the camps at Baqubah. In the winter of 1918, their future looked grim indeed. Angry and resentful, they blamed their plight on the Allies. To this day, many Assyrian nationalists insist, falsely, that the Assyrians were drawn into the war by British and French blandishments. Most of the responsibility for the disasters suffered by both Churches during the First World War lay with the young Nestorian patriarch Shemʿon XIX Benjamin, who was persuaded by his feckless advisers to take up arms against the Turks in 1915 when neutrality still lay within his grasp. Like so many earlier occupants of the throne of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, he failed his people completely. Surprisingly, he has since been forgiven. His murder in March 1918 salvaged his reputation, and he is now remembered by most Assyrians as a martyr.

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The Postwar History of the Assyrian Church of the East. By the end of the First World War most of the Assyrians of the Hakkari and Urmia regions had been forced to abandon the villages where they had lived undisturbed for centuries, and were homeless refugees in Iraq. The history of the Nestorian Church (or as it now styles itself, the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East) since 1918 is a melancholy story of a Church in exile. Although many of the Urmia Assyrians were able to return to their old villages after the war, few of the Assyrians from the Hakkari region ever saw their homes again. They and their descendants are now scattered around the world. Some of them remained in Iraq, close to their former homes, alongside the Chaldeans of the Mosul plain and in the larger cities. Most, however, have left their troubled homelands, and now live in the diaspora communities in Western Europe, Russia, the Middle East, America and Australia.

Some modern scholars have suggested that the British authorities in Iraq missed a golden opportunity to send the Hakkari Assyrians back to their homes in the winter of 1918, when Turkey was exhausted and at the mercy of the Allies. Such an initiative was quite out of the question. Like the survivors of the Nazi extermination camps one war later, the refugees were exhausted, malnourished and emaciated. Even if they had been fit enough to make the journey from Baquba after the hardships they had undergone only a few weeks earlier, conditions in eastern Turkey were chaotic. For the time being, both the Hakkari and Urmia Assyrians had to settle as refugees in British-administered Iraq, one of several Middle East states constituted in the 1920s from the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire. They were mostly settled in villages in the Mosul and ‘Amadiya regions, often alongside Chaldean communities that had been living in these regions for centuries. After centuries of Ottoman misgovernment, the Assyrians briefly enjoyed the protection of a Christian power which prized the rule of law. Guessing, however, that British rule in Iraq was unlikely to last for more than one or two decades, few of them were inclined to count their blessings.

In 1919 much of the territory of the former Ottoman Empire, including Syria and Iraq, was under Allied occupation, and the Allies were determined that these territories would not return to Turkish rule. Their solution was to create several new states out of the former Ottoman territories, which would initially be administered by either Britain or France under mandates from the League of Nations. Meanwhile, in their peace negotiations with Turkey, the Allies also emphasised the principle of self-determination, and before it was repudiated by a nationalist Turkish government in 1923, the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres envisaged independent Armenian and Kurdish states and autonomy for other religious minorities. For many Assyrians, the future seemed to offer the enticing prospect of an independent or semi-independent Assyrian state, preferably under

British protection. In 1920, shortly before his death, the patriarch Shem'on XX Paul argued that the Assyrian refugees should be permitted to return to their old homes in the Hakkari and Urmia regions, and that these regions, together with the Mosul and 'Amadiya regions of northern Iraq, should be placed under a British protectorate. Even couched in these mild terms, Mar Shem'on's proposal was unrealistic, as neither the Turks, the Iraqis or the Persians would have tolerated the existence of such a protectorate, nor were the British willing to assume such a burden. Tragically, the Assyrians could not see that their only hope of resettling their own lands was as loyal citizens of the postwar states of Turkey, Persia and Iraq, with no special privileges due to their religion or indigenous status. Most of them believed that the Allies were morally committed to provide them with a secure future, and in the expectation that they would ultimately be able to return to their old homes rejected a proposal made in 1919 for resettlement in Canada, and also turned down later proposals for a settlement in either Brazil or in British Guiana. Their cause was undoubtedly damaged by their unwillingness to consider anything less than privileged resettlement. It was also undermined by exorbitant demands from Hakkari extremists for the establishment of an independent Assyrian state that would include not only Nestorians and Chaldeans but also Jacobites, Syrian Catholics, Maronites and Yezidis, with frontiers stretching as far west as Sinjar and Diyarbakir.

The British government sympathised with Assyrian aspirations for some form of autonomy, and the possibility of resettlement in Kurdistan was closely studied. In 1919 the British authorities in Iraq proposed that an Assyrian colony should be established in the 'Amadiya district. The local Kurds had recently murdered some British political officers, and it was envisaged that they should be evicted from their lands to make way for the Assyrians. The scheme was supported by most of the Assyrian refugee population, and also received favourable consideration from the British government, but was abandoned in 1920 because other military commitments were more pressing, and no British troops could for the moment be spared to drive the Kurds from their lands. Disappointed by the failure of the 'Amadiya proposal, the British authorities in Iraq decided to arm the Assyrians so that they could retake their old lands themselves. A force of 6,000 Assyrians, comprising both Hakkari mountaineers and Urmia plainsmen, was organised and armed during the summer of 1920, and placed under the command of the wartime guerilla commander Agha Petros. Local British army units provided transport mules for the expedition, and staff officers drew up a plan for the force to advance into Kurdistan and occupy, peacefully if possible, an area straddling the Turkish-Persian border between Gawar, Eshnuq and Urmia. The expedition assembled, as planned, around the 'Aqra Dagh, and on 19 October crossed the

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Great Zab into the territory of the Surchi and Zibari Kurds, who were hostile to the British. The outnumbered Kurdish tribal levies tried unsuccessfully to resist the invaders, and retreated eastwards into the Nerwa and Raikan districts. At this point Agha Petros should have pressed on towards Neri and the Persian border, but instead he decided to pursue the defeated Kurds. This change of direction took the expedition close to the Tiyari and Tkhuma mountains. The men from these districts could not resist the temptation to settle the score with the Kurds who had occupied their ancestral villages, and broke away from the main force to pursue a private vendetta. The Urmia Assyrians were left deserted in unfamiliar territory and retreated in disorder to 'Aqra and Mindan after losing about a hundred men in the bitter cold of an early winter. The Hakkari mountaineers, armed with modern British rifles, skirmished with the Kurds in Tkhuma and Tiyari for a few days before they too fell back to Mindan.

Following the failure of this 'self-help' policy Britain resorted to diplomatic pressure. The border between Turkey and Iraq had yet to be permanently settled, and in 1924 the Turks, under an aggressively nationalist government, pressed strongly at the League of Nations for the Mosul *vilayet*, the northernmost administrative unit in British Iraq, to be restored to Turkey. At first the British were inclined to agree to this proposal, provided that the Turks offered special guarantees of autonomy for the Assyrians, but the Turkish government insisted that minority rights were already adequately protected under the new Turkish constitution. Recognising that the Assyrians would never agree to live under Turkish sovereignty unless the Turks granted them some degree of autonomy, the British proposed instead that Turkey should cede the border districts of Tiyari, Tkhuma, Baz and Jilu in the Hakkari *vilayet* to Iraq, and that these districts should be incorporated into the Mosul *vilayet* to form a national home for the Assyrians. Unsurprisingly, the Turks rejected this proposal. They also hastened to make good their claim to the Hakkari region. Since the end of the war a large number of Assyrians had surreptitiously returned to their ancestral homes in the mountains and rebuilt their destroyed villages. Faced with the unwelcome prospect of a League commission prying into its internal affairs, the Turkish government decided to present the League with a *fait accompli*. The Turkish army ruthlessly moved against the Assyrian settlers in September 1924, burning down the reoccupied villages and expelling their inhabitants. Several hundred Assyrians were killed during this operation and most of the survivors fled back across the border to the precarious security of Iraq. Turkish units even crossed the disputed border near Zakho, but were put to flight by British regular troops and Assyrian tribesmen, who counterattacked after the invaders had been decimated by the Royal Air Force. Prominent among the Assyrian ranks was the pugnacious bishop

Yalda Yahballaha of Berwari, who successfully attacked Turkish positions around the Berwari village of Aina d’Nune at the head of the tribesmen of his diocese.

In July 1925 the League settled the border dispute between Turkey and Iraq by confirming Turkey in possession of the Hakkari *vilayet* and awarding the Mosul *vilayet* to Iraq. The League commission that recommended this solution declared that it would be unfair to strip Turkey of the Hakkari region to gratify the Assyrians, as they had rebelled against their lawful rulers in 1915 ‘without cause or provocation, at the instigation of foreigners.’ This harsh judgement, which made no mention of the Armenian massacres, was certainly not how the Assyrians would have described the events of 1915; but it was not entirely unreasonable. The Hakkari Assyrians had indeed risen against the Turks in 1915, despite Turkish assurances that their neutrality would be respected, at the behest of the Russians. The British, who strove conscientiously to uphold the principles of the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s, bowed unhappily to this decision. The Assyrians could not understand why a Great Power should behave so supinely. Unable to comprehend why the British did not immediately go to war with Turkey to reconquer the Hakkari region for them, they complained bitterly against their protectors. The British, for their part, were becoming just as disenchanted with the Assyrians. British officials in Iraq had at first treated these Christian refugees sympathetically, but as the decade wore on they increasingly complained about the ingratitude of their charges. The Assyrians, they said, invariably spurned the limited offers of help that were made to them, but never suggested any viable alternatives. Even the Anglican missionary William Ainger Wigram, a tireless spokesman for the plight of the Assyrians, confided to the archbishop of Canterbury that they had become ‘a people that follows no leader, stands by no plan, and is too insanely suspicious to accept any project put forward by its friends.’

One of the reasons for the demoralisation of the Assyrian refugees was that they had for several years been deprived of effective leadership. The elderly *mutran* Isaac Hnanisho^c, the chief adviser to the untried young patriarch Shem^con XX Paul, died in Kermanshah in 1918. He was succeeded by his nephew Joseph Hnanisho^c, who did not yet have the experience to do justice to his office. In May 1920 Shem^con XX Paul, exhausted by the privations of the march from Urmia and the rigours of the first months in Iraq, succumbed to tuberculosis. He was only 30 years old when he died, and had spent the final months of his life as an invalid in the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul. The only member of the patriarchal family available to replace him was his eleven-year-old nephew Eshai. This callow youth was consecrated patriarch in June 1920. The uncanonical consecration of a mere boy, at a time when a strong leader was needed, was resented by many Assyrians, and the prestige of the patriarchal family

fell sharply. Shem'on XXI Eshai (1920–75) began his long and disastrous reign under a cloud, and struggled thereafter to assert his authority. The events of the next few decades did nothing to dispel the unfavourable impression produced at his accession, and the scandalous circumstances of his murder in 1975 finally discredited the obnoxious custom of hereditary succession to the patriarchate.

During the crucial decade of the 1920s, Shem'on XXI Eshai only enjoyed the support of a fraction of his people. In 1920 the British authorities, acting on Wigram's advice, expelled Agha Petros from Iraq, thereby removing one obvious challenge to the patriarch's authority. But the young Eshai was unable to win the confidence of the Assyrians, who believed that he was under the thumb of his imperious aunt Surma. His stock sank further when he left Iraq in 1924 to complete his education in England, at Saint Augustine's College in Canterbury. The Anglican authorities who arranged this sojourn hoped that a British theological education would instil in the Assyrian patriarch the instincts of an English gentleman, but during his three years in England he acquired only the manners of the British governing classes, not their outlook. Shortly after his return to Iraq in 1927 he became embroiled in a dispute with the metropolitan Abimalek Timothy of Malabar, one of the few remaining Nestorian bishops. Abimalek Timothy, a member of the influential Qellaita family of the Hakkari village of Mar Behisho^c, had protested strongly at Eshai's uncanonical consecration in 1920, and had been placated by the patriarchal family with the promise of a 'regency' over the young patriarch. In 1928 he returned to Iraq and attempted to influence the direction of Church affairs. One of the most important Assyrian spokesmen at this period was Joseph Qellaita, an energetic reformer who ran a school in Mosul and had set up a printing press to produce service books for the Assyrian refugees in Iraq. Mar Timothy ostentatiously supported his young kinsman's work, and eventually ordained him a priest. He thereby fell foul of the patriarch, who viewed this act as a provocation. Mar Shem'on, perhaps conscious of his own failings as a leader, reacted jealously to Timothy's interference, and as a result of his complaints the British ordered the metropolitan to leave Iraq and return to India.

While the British mandatory authorities were doing what little they could to sustain the unpopular Assyrian patriarch, they were also stirring up trouble for the future by making use of the Assyrians in a military capacity. During the 1920s thousands of Assyrian men were enrolled in the Assyrian Levies, a militia raised by the British to police Iraq. The British used the Assyrians to expel a Turkish force from Rawanduz and crush a Kurdish uprising at Suleimaniya in 1923, and during a disturbance at Kirkuk in 1924 Assyrian soldiers killed around 100 Muslims. These incidents were greatly resented by many Arab Muslims in

Iraq, creating an atmosphere of growing tension as the end of the mandate drew near. Like the *qayajaye*, the hated Christian mercenaries used by the Mongols to maintain law and order six centuries earlier, the Assyrian Levies were despised by Iraq's Muslims as tools of a foreign power. Some British officials appreciated the potential risks of the policy of using Christians to police Muslims, but they were unable to argue against the claim that it provided gainful employment for able-bodied refugees who would otherwise have rotted in idleness in the camps.

The 1925 settlement of the border between Turkey and Iraq ended any prospect of the Hakkari Assyrians returning to their old homes, and left the British mandatory government and its successor Iraqi government with continued responsibility for an increasingly restive refugee population. The British mandate in Iraq ended in 1932, with the Assyrian resettlement problem still unresolved. However, the Assyrians were not left entirely at the mercy of the new Iraqi government, as the British continued to maintain a number of military bases in Iraq, which were guarded by the Assyrian Levies. In April 1933 the patriarch Shem'on XXI Eshai was summoned to Baghdad and placed under house arrest by the Iraqi government, alarmed at reports of growing support among the Assyrians for an extremist party. This step prompted a group of 300 Assyrians, armed with rifles retained from their service in the Levies, to attempt to cross the Euphrates into Syria in July. At Feshkhabur they were refused entry by the French authorities. During the last week in July, while the Iraqi authorities attempted to ascertain French intentions, they remained at Feshkhabur. During this period the bulk of the Iraqi army was rushed to the border with Syria. At the end of July the French told the Assyrians that they could not enter Syria. The Assyrians, who still retained their rifles, tried to return to Iraq. As they began to cross the Khabur river near the village of Deirabun, they clashed with Iraqi soldiers who had been ordered to disarm them. Losses on both sides were light, but this skirmish was followed in the first week of August by the cold-blooded massacre of the Assyrian population of Semmel and several other Christian villages in the Dohuk district by the Iraqi army. This slaughter was conducted with the consent of the Iraqi prime minister and the minister of the interior.

Having taught the Assyrians a harsh lesson at Semmel, the Iraqis went on to expel the patriarch Shem'on XXI Eshai from Iraq. In late August 1933 the British flew him from Baghdad to Palestine, and from there to Cyprus, and in October he pleaded his people's cause before the League of Nations in Geneva. He was not allowed to return to Iraq, and spent the remaining years before the Second World War in Geneva, Paris, London and elsewhere, vainly demanding that the Assyrians should be given a country of their own, carved out of the territory of northern Iraq. This unrealistic demand alienated his sympathisers abroad, and

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lost him what little external support he had. Eventually he settled in the United States, and became an American citizen. Meanwhile, back in Iraq, Assyrian anger at the Semmel massacre was directed less at the Iraqis, who had perpetrated the massacre, than at the British, who had supposedly failed to restrain them. During the next few years a flurry of intemperate books and pamphlets accused the British of betraying the Assyrians. R S Stafford's *The Assyrian Tragedy*, a thoughtful account of the Semmel massacre by a well-placed eyewitness, demonstrates how baseless such charges were. In 1933 Iraq was an independent state, and the pleas for moderation by the few British advisers who remained in the country were ignored both by the Iraqi government and by the Iraqi army.

As a result of the 1933 massacre a committee of the League Council was appointed to study the possibility of resettling the Assyrians in Syria. It was hoped ultimately to provide a permanent settlement for about 30,000 Assyrians in the Ghab district in the Orontes valley, and while long-term plans were being drawn up a temporary settlement was established in the Khabur valley. By the end of 1933 about 8,500 Assyrians had settled in the Khabur valley, and a camp at Mosul established after the Dohuk and Semmel massacres for Assyrians who refused to continue living in scattered villages was closed. In 1936 the League of Nations reluctantly abandoned the Ghab resettlement proposal, as the cost of draining thousands of acres of marshland for settlement was far higher than had been envisaged. The project was also unpopular with Syria's Muslim majority, and the Syrian authorities were therefore reluctant to allocate more than a fraction of the land required. The most important factor, however, was that the French government had recently indicated that it wanted to relinquish its mandate in Syria. As the Assyrians would soon be no safer in Syria than they were in Iraq, there seemed little point in simply moving them from one Arab country to another. No further emigration to Syria was permitted, but the Assyrians who had already settled in the Khabur valley were allowed to remain.

Meanwhile, the prospects for the Assyrians in Iraq were looking rather more encouraging than they had some years earlier, and a sense of security was gradually returning after the massacres of 1933. A report from the Iraqi government to the League Council in September 1938 mentioned 73 villages settled by Hakkari Assyrians around 'Amadiya, Dohuk and Rawanduz. For those refugees who were unwilling to settle in villages, several camps were established in Baghdad, Habbaniya, Dohuk and Mosul, and many Assyrians continued in service with the Assyrian Levies or in other capacities with the British forces, enjoying the security of the continued British military presence in Iraq. Others settled in Baghdad and other major cities. By the middle of the 1930s there were probably about 22,000 Assyrian refugees in Iraq. In November 1936 the British government

concluded that they would eventually be prepared to settle permanently in Iraq. This assessment was correct. The British retained military bases at Habbaniya and Shaibah until the 1950s, and their presence helped to reassure the Assyrians, many of whom worked in these bases. In turn, the Assyrian Levies fought for the Allied cause during the Second World War. Britain's precarious hold on Egypt in the summer of 1941 was threatened by a pro-Axis coup mounted in Iraq by Rashid Ali, which was only put down after a full-scale military campaign. Assyrian Levy units fought side by side with British forces in the decisive battles at Habbaniya and Baghdad. After the war the British withdrew from Iraq, and the Levies were disbanded. By then most of the Assyrians of Iraq saw themselves as Iraqis, and many demonstrated their commitment to the Iraqi state by serving in the Iraqi army in the war against Iran in the 1980s and, more recently, in the first Gulf War.

Most of the Assyrians resettled in Iraq were from the Hakkari region. The refugees from the Urmia region, on the other hand, hoped ultimately to return to Iran. Many of them were permitted to return to the larger villages of the Urmia plain in 1922, but even after twenty years of relative peace its Christian population was less than a third of what it had been in 1914. Nevertheless, a sufficiently large number returned for the American missionaries to revive their interrupted work in the Urmia region, and a number of churches were reopened in the 1920s. The missionary work came abruptly to an end in 1934, when all foreigners were expelled from Azerbaijan, but the Assyrian communities were permitted to remain in their old villages. At the end of the Second World War many Assyrians in the Urmia region supported a short-lived Azerbaijani separatist movement, which was crushed by the Persian army in October 1946. Reprisals were taken against them by Muslims who had not supported the revolt, and many able-bodied Assyrians then abandoned their ancestral villages in Urmia to join their relatives and friends in the major cities of Iran, where they could live in greater economic and political security. In 1966 it was estimated that there were about 1,400 Assyrian families living in the larger villages of the Urmia plain, about a fifth of the 1914 population.

The Schism of 1968 and Its Consequences. After 1933 most of the Assyrians of Iraq, Iran and the diaspora remained grudgingly loyal to the exiled patriarch Shemʿon XXI Eshai, who was represented in Iraq by the *mutran* Joseph Hnanishoʿ, who resided at Harir near Erbil. In 1968, however, a schism occurred in the Assyrian Church, ostensibly as a result of a dispute over the church calendar. Shemʿon XXI had replaced the Julian calendar with the Gregorian calendar several years earlier, bringing the Church of the East into line with Western practice, and this decision had upset many traditionalists. In fact, the underlying cause of the

schism was a feud between the patriarch Shem'on XXI Eshai and the *malik* Joseph Hoshaba of Upper Tiyyari, who used the calendar dispute as an opportunity to strike a blow at the patriarch and increase the influence of the Tiyyari tribe. The metropolitan Thomas Darmo of Trichur, an opponent of hereditary succession to the patriarchate, placed himself at the head of the traditionalists. In January 1964 Shem'on XXI suspended Thomas Darmo, who appealed against this decision in the Kerala courts. The lawyers consulted the acts of the Sasanian synods of the Church of the East and ultimately found in favour of Darmo, on the grounds that the patriarch had contravened the canons adopted at the synod of Joseph in 554. The break between the patriarch and his injured metropolitan was now complete, and Joseph Hoshaba persuaded Darmo to challenge the patriarch for the leadership of the Church. Darmo agreed to consecrate a metropolitan from the Tiyyari tribe in return for its support.

On 7 September 1968 Darmo flew to Baghdad. He had not only the support of the Tiyyari tribe but also the connivance of the newly-installed Ba'athist government, which preferred to see the Church of the East ruled by a resident patriarch instead of from California. In Baghdad, with the new government's support, he denounced the absent Mar Shem'on and was elected patriarch in his stead. The Iraqi government immediately recognised him as head of the Assyrian Church of the East, and ordered all the Assyrian churches in Iraq to be handed over to him. Darmo quickly provided himself with an episcopal hierarchy. He consecrated George Mookken metropolitan of Trichur, under the name Mar Aprem, and fulfilled his bargain with Joseph Hoshaba by consecrating Shlemun Giwargis of Ashitha metropolitan of Baghdad, under the name Mar Addai. On 11 October the new metropolitans Mar Addai and Mar Aprem consecrated Thomas Darmo patriarch in the cathedral of Mar Zay'a in Baghdad.

Darmo began an energetic reorganisation of the administration of the Church of the East, but his work was cut short by his death in September 1969, less than a year after his consecration, after a prostate gland operation in Saint Raphael's hospital in Baghdad. Mar Addai was elected as his successor in February 1970 and was consecrated patriarch in February 1972, taking the title Addai II Giwargis. The Ancient Church of the East, as Mar Addai's group called itself, suffered a major blow at the outset of its existence, when the Iraqi government discovered how little support it enjoyed from Iraqi Assyrians. In December 1969, shortly after Darmo's death, the Iraqi government invited Shem'on XXI Eshai to urge the Assyrians of Iraq to be loyal citizens. Mar Shem'on enthusiastically complied, and his letter, published in February 1970, satisfied the Ba'athist regime. The Iraqi government thereupon transferred its support to Mar Shem'on, who visited Iraq in the summer of 1970 and was officially recognised as the head of the country's

Assyrian community. The churches that had been handed over to Darmo's group in 1968 were returned to their former owners.

In 1971 Shem'on XXI Eshai held a synod which abolished the custom of hereditary succession to the patriarchate, consolidating his support among modernisers who were uncomfortable with this uncanonical practice. It was widely believed, however, that he took this decision not on principle but merely because he had no nephews of his own. In January 1973, worn down by persistent demands from his bishops that he should return to Iraq, and anxious for retirement after 53 years in office, he tendered his resignation. After some discussion, he was persuaded to remain at the head of the Church until a successor could be chosen. In August 1973, to the horror of his bishops, he married. The Assyrian bishops hurriedly convened a synod under the presidency of the *mutran* Joseph Hnanisho^c, which deposed the patriarch, declared his reign illegitimate, and definitively abolished hereditary succession to the patriarchate. As the patriarch Joseph had done fourteen centuries earlier, Mar Shem'on refused to admit the authority of the synod. It was agreed that a further synod would be held in Seattle at the end of 1975 to resolve the issue, but in November 1975 the beleaguered patriarch was assassinated in California by David Malik Isma'il of the Tiyyari tribe. The assassin, who served a twelve-year jail sentence for murder, claimed to have been avenging the disgrace brought upon the Church of the East by the patriarch's recent marriage.

Shem'on XXI Eshai, appointed patriarch at the tender age of eleven, had been first exiled, then deposed and finally murdered. Remembered as a martyr in some quarters, he was patriarch during one of the most trying periods in the long and chequered history of the Church of the East. Like many of his predecessors, he lacked the statesmanship to make the best of the poor hand he had been dealt by circumstances. His initial support for an Assyrian homeland, however popular a stance, was unrealistic; and by antagonising the Turks, the British, the Iraqis and the Iranians he needlessly marginalised the Assyrian Church of the East at a time when it needed all the allies it could find. His intransigence in this respect compares unfavourably with the pragmatism of his Chaldean counterpart Emmanuel II Thomas, which secured several decades of relative peace for the Chaldean Church in Iraq. In later life Mar Shem'on modified his position, pledging his support to the Iraqi government, but he did so only when his position was threatened by Thomas Darmo's rebellion. It is difficult to judge how far he was responsible for the schism of 1968, but his confrontational style surely contributed to the breakdown of relations between him and his opponents. His decision to marry without renouncing the patriarchate was a studied affront to the traditions of the Church of the East, and he paid for it with his life. Ironically, his most enduring

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legacy was his adoption of the apostle Simon Peter as the founder of the Church of the East. Saint Peter had no connection whatsoever with the early Persian Church, but Mar Shem'on interpreted literally the greetings sent by the apostle from 'the Church that is in Babylon' (1 Peter 5:13). In fact, Peter was referring not to Babylon on the Euphrates but to Rome, the notorious 'whore of Babylon', where Christians were living under the threat of persecution by the emperor Nero. Mar Shem'on brushed aside the inconvenient objections of scholars, and in recent decades the myth of Saint Peter has been embraced enthusiastically by Nestorians and Chaldeans alike.

Since December 1973 the Church of the East had been governed by the bishops Narsai Eliya of Lebanon, Dinkha Hnanya of Teheran and Aprem Hormizd Khamis of Basra. In October 1976 a synod was held to elect a new patriarch. The bishops of the Church of the East were by now dispersed across the world, and it was found convenient to hold the synod in England, at a small priory in Hampshire. There were two candidates, Dinkha of Teheran and Narsai of Lebanon. Mar Dinkha, although Iraqi by birth, was Iranian by nationality, and it was rumoured that his rival enjoyed the support of the Iraqi government, whose country was then at war with Iran. Mar Dinkha, who was slightly older than Mar Narsai and had been consecrated before Darmono's suspension, won the election, and was consecrated by Mar Narsai in a church in the London borough of Ealing in October 1976, taking the title Dinkha IV Hnanya. Strictly speaking, he should have called himself Dinkha III Hnanya, as there had only been two previous patriarchs named Denha, but his advisers were taken in by Joseph Qellaita's claims for the non-existent patriarch 'Denha III (1359–68)'. Dinkha IV was unrelated to the old patriarchal family, and his election ended the uncanonical tradition of hereditary succession among the Nestorians. The event was also historically significant as the only occasion on which a Nestorian patriarch has been consecrated outside Mesopotamia.

Mar Addai refused to accept the legitimacy of Dinkha IV's succession in 1976. This was a sadly-missed opportunity, as the renunciation of hereditary succession by the Assyrian Church of the East removed one of the main obstacles to a reunion between the two factions. Although Mar Addai continues to enjoy the support of a number of bishops, the long-term prospects for his Ancient Church look unpromising. In 1989 his group lost a lawsuit in Sydney in which they laid claim to church property held by their opponents; and in 1995 the ebullient metropolitan Aprem of Trichur, who had been a high-profile spokesman for the Ancient Church, went over to Mar Dinkha's group. Negotiations have taken place from time to time between the two factions to end the schism, on the basis that Dinkha IV would be recognised as the sole legitimate patriarch and would

return to Baghdad and reside there. So far nothing has come of them, probably because Mar Addai enjoys being a patriarch. It seems likely that the schism will eventually be healed, but perhaps only after Mar Addai's death.

In recent years, Dinkha IV's Assyrian Church of the East has pursued reconciliation and ecumenical dialogue with both the Roman Catholic Church and with the miaphysite Churches of the Middle East, with only limited success. In 1984 an attempt by the Assyrian Church to gain admission to the Middle East Council of Churches was thwarted by an alliance of the region's Oriental Orthodox Churches, led by the Coptic Church of Egypt. A second attempt a decade later was also wrecked by the Copts. Genuine efforts were made by both sides to find common ground, and the various Churches even reached agreement on a joint declaration on christology. This joint declaration was ratified by the synod of the Assyrian Church in 1995, but was never brought before the Coptic synod. Dinkha IV made rather more progress with the Roman Catholic Church. In November 1994, in the wake of a meeting between the Assyrian patriarch and Pope John Paul II in the Vatican, the two Churches issued a joint christological declaration that incorporated language from the definition agreed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (though no reference was made to the Council itself, and the key passage in the definition, which had divided the Christian world for so many centuries, was omitted). This veiled concession on the part of the Assyrians was matched by a commitment from the Vatican to give diplomatic support to the Assyrian communities in the Middle East. The 1994 declaration, which marked the first official recognition of the Church of the East by another Christian Church, was followed in 1997 by an agreement between the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches to work together for some form of union.

So far, however, neither accord has had much practical effect, though some progress has been made. In 2001 the Vatican recognised the legitimacy and validity of one of the oldest liturgical texts of the Church of the East, the so-called Anaphora of Addai and Mari, in its original form (in other words, shorn of its undiplomatic Institution Narrative, which was added at a later date). Assyrian and Chaldean bishops also talk to each other a little more often than they used to do. Unfortunately, the Vatican has been unable to overcome the hostility of the miaphysite Churches towards the Nestorians. In 1997 the Assyrian Church announced that it would remove from its service books the time-honoured denunciations of Cyril of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch, but this gallant attempt by Dinkha IV to ease relations with the Jacobite and Coptic Churches foundered in 1988 on the insistence of the hardline Coptic pope Shenouda III that the Assyrian Church should also disavow Nestorius. Although their patriarchs no longer hurl anathemas at one another, as they once did, the Churches of the

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Middle East are still unable to escape from the shadow of the Council of Ephesus. The use of eirenic language to gloss over the theological distinctions between the Nestorians and the Jacobites has not succeeded. Some Western scholars have tried to replace the terms 'monophysite' and 'dyophysite' with less offensive terms such as 'henophysite' and 'diphsite', and have argued, correctly, that neither Nestorius nor the Nestorian Church were ever Nestorian. But memories are long in the Middle East, and the miaphysite churches remain deeply suspicious of overtures from their dyophysite rivals. After fourteen centuries of mutual distrust, such intransigence is hardly surprising. Despite the example of Yahballaha III and Bar Hebraeus in the thirteenth century, and despite the best efforts of the peacemakers of our own time, the hostility between the Jacobites and the Nestorians is unlikely to be overcome in a single generation.

The Postwar History of the Chaldean Church. The experience of the Chaldean Church during the First World War differed considerably from diocese to diocese, depending on the attitude of the local Turkish army commanders. Unlike his Nestorian counterpart Shemʿon XIX Benjamin, the Chaldean patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas bowed his head to the storm and avoided needlessly antagonising the Turks. The Turks, for their part, shaped their policy in accordance with their military needs. While ruthlessly clearing the untrustworthy Armenians away from their lines of communication, they made no attempt to stir up trouble in Christian districts well behind the front line. Their aim, in modern terms, was limited ethnic cleansing, not genocide. As a result, while the Chaldeans of the western dioceses suffered alongside the Armenians, the Chaldeans of northern Iraq were virtually untouched by the war. Manuscripts continued to be copied between 1914 and 1918 in Alqosh and in the nearby monastery of Notre Dame des Semences. Christian worship continued without serious disturbance in Mosul and the villages of the Mosul plain, in Mengeshe and the smaller Chaldean villages between Zakho and ʿAqra, in Erbil and Kirkuk, and in Baghdad and Basra.

In the western Chaldean dioceses, however, where Chaldeans lived alongside Armenians, disaster was almost total. The Turks and their Kurdish allies made no distinction between Armenian, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic and Chaldean Christians. Most of the centuries-old Chaldean settlements in the historic dioceses of Amid, Mardin, Gazarta and Seert were destroyed. Chaldean villages in the recently-established diocese of Van were also wiped out. Two Chaldean metropolitans were killed in these massacres, along with hundreds of priests. As many as 10,000 Chaldeans may have lost their lives in the 1915 massacres, around two-thirds of the 1913 Chaldean population of the western dioceses. Further to the east, the Chaldeans of the dioceses of Urmia and Salmas also suffered heavy losses

during the wartime fighting around these towns and in the retreat to Hamadan in October 1918. Perhaps around 5,000 Chaldeans from these two dioceses, out of a pre-war population of just under 19,000, lost their lives between 1915 and 1918. In all, Chaldean casualties may have amounted to 15,000, out of a total pre-war population of just over 100,000. These casualties were significantly lower, both in absolute and in relative terms, than the 40,000 casualties suffered by the Assyrians of the Kochanes patriarchate. Between 1915 and 1918, after three and a half centuries of fierce competition, the Chaldean Church finally drew ahead of the Nestorian Church to become the larger of the two Churches. It was a barren victory, gained under circumstances that robbed it of any sweetness.

During the 1920s and 1930s the Chaldean Church salvaged what it could from the destruction of its western dioceses and sought to assimilate a large Assyrian refugee population. The Chaldeans of northern Iraq, who had not been seriously affected by the violence in eastern Turkey and western Iran, found themselves living under a benign British mandate after the war. The border settlement between Iraq and Turkey in 1925 gave Iraq the Zakho, Dohuk, Berwari, Nerwa, Raikan, ‘Amadiya and ‘Aqra districts, together with the Mosul, Rawanduz, Erbil and Kirkuk districts further south. These districts, which contained a large number of mostly-Chaldean villages before 1914, were not affected by the fighting. Their Christian population was swelled in the 1920s and 1930s by an influx of Assyrian refugees from the Hakkari region who were unable to return to their old homes after the region was awarded to Turkey in the border settlement. Some of the refugees settled in villages which had formerly been Christian, while others founded new villages. Statistics from this period show a marked increase in the number of villages listed as Christian in the Chaldean dioceses of Zakho, ‘Amadiya, ‘Aqra and Mosul, reflecting the impact of the Assyrian refugees. Several of the new settlements are marked on contemporary maps—Deirabun, Deirunke, Dornakh and Peda near Zakho; Deraluk, Halilane and Sedara near ‘Amadiya; Gilgoran, Hassanya and Hazarjut near ‘Aqra; and Sharafya and Deidaban near Alqosh. Some of the refugees remained Nestorians, but many others, influenced by their new surroundings, converted to Catholicism.

Compared to the tribulations of the Assyrians, the history of the Chaldean Church during the 1930s and 1940s was blessedly uneventful. The Chaldean patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas, more realistic than his Assyrian counterpart Shem‘on XXI Eshai, sought a cautious accommodation with the Iraqi state. He made no attempt to claim a privileged status for the Chaldeans, and encouraged Chaldean Christians to integrate into Iraqi society. Emmanuel II was a member of the Iraqi senate during the mandate period, and his position remained unchanged after independence. After his death in 1947 at the age of 97, he was succeeded by Joseph VII Ghanima

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(1947–58), also a member of the Iraqi senate. Joseph Ghanima's nine-year reign, like that of his predecessor, was a period of peaceful consolidation and modest progress. Modern Chaldeans look back with nostalgia to those days.

Joseph Ghanima died in Baghdad in July 1958, and was succeeded in December of the same year by Paul II Cheikho (1958–89). During his reign Chaldean Christians in Iraq suffered terribly under the rule of Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athist party. Officially, these should have been good times for the Chaldean Church. The Iraqi dictator hated the Kurds, and was not averse to cultivating the Assyrians and Chaldeans as a counterpoise. A number of imposing Chaldean churches were built in Baghdad and elsewhere during Paul Cheikho's reign, and some Chaldeans rose to positions of prominence in the Baathist government. Tariq 'Aziz, a Chaldean Christian from Telkepe who served as Iraq's foreign minister and deputy prime minister for twenty years until his downfall in 2003, was the most famous of these collaborators. In practice, however, many Assyrian Christians (most of them Chaldeans) were either killed or dispossessed during Saddam Hussein's brutal campaigns against the Kurds of northern Iraq. A number of Chaldean villages around 'Amadiya were destroyed by the Iraqi army during operations against the Kurds in the 1960s. In the 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein launched his Anfal campaign against the Kurds. The most infamous incident of this campaign was the extermination of the Kurdish population of Halabja, near the Iranian border, by gas attack, but the campaign ranged widely across northern Iraq, and hundreds of other Kurdish villages were also wiped out. The Iraqi troops were not nice in their distinctions, and Assyrian, Chaldean and Yezidi villages were also attacked. Once again, the villages around 'Amadiya bore the brunt of the violence. Chaldean Christians were driven from villages where they had lived for centuries, and their churches and homes were bulldozed. Their historic heritage was also destroyed. The long-abandoned monasteries of Mar 'Abdisho' in the Sapna valley and Mar Qayyoma in the Berwari district were dynamited by army engineers, purely out of spite.

Paul Cheikho died in 1989, and was succeeded by Raphael I Bidawid, formerly bishop of Beirut. Raphael Bidawid's turbulent patriarchate was marked by the two Gulf Wars, and was again a period of great suffering for the Chaldeans of Iraq. The defeat of the Iraqi army in the spring of 1991 sparked off uprisings by the Kurds in the north of Iraq and the Shias in the south against Saddam Hussein's government. After initial successes, these risings were suppressed by the Iraqi army. In panic, more than half a million Kurds and Christians, most of them Chaldeans, abandoned their homes in northern Iraq and fled across the border into Syria, Turkey and Iran. The luckiest were those who opted for Syria. Their crossing was relatively straightforward, and they were quietly resettled among

the Assyrians of the Khabur valley. Those who fled to Turkey and Iran were less fortunate. Thousands never reached the end of their journey, dying of cold in the bleak mountains of Kurdistan. Thousands more died of malnutrition in the weeks before a coordinated international relief effort could be mounted. Losses among the Chaldean and Assyrian Christians were proportionally heavier than among the Kurds, as they lacked the Kurds' powerful tribal organisation, and often lost out in the scramble for supplies.

Many Chaldean and Assyrian villages were included in the postwar 'Safe Haven' established by the allied coalition north of Mosul. This removed them from the clutches of Saddam Hussein, but only to deliver them up to the tender mercies of the Kurds. The Kurds, unrestrained by the Iraqi army, settled old scores with their Christian neighbours. Money was extorted from Christians by threats of violence, or their property was seized. A number of Christian men were beaten or murdered, and several Christian women were raped. In 2001, the Assyrian governor of Erbil was assassinated. These events were documented in several Amnesty International reports, but went almost unnoticed beyond Iraq. Western leaders were preoccupied with Saddam Hussein, and the Kurds had long been portrayed as innocent victims of Saddam's violence. Life was no better for the Christians living in the rest of Iraq. The country's infrastructure had been devastated by air bombardment during the Gulf War, and during the final decade of the twentieth century international sanctions were applied against Saddam Hussein's regime, inflicting further miseries on the long-suffering people of Iraq. During these years the Chaldeans and Assyrians living to the south of the security zone had to endure the same privations as other Iraqis. The resentment felt towards the Western coalition by ordinary Iraqis sometimes spilled over into violence against Iraq's Christian minority.

The present patriarch of Babylon is Emmanuel III Delly, who succeeded Raphael Bidawid in 2003, shortly after the end of the second Gulf War. The Chaldean bishops were faced with the disagreeable choice of electing either a hardline Iraqi bishop or a more liberal candidate from the American diaspora. In the end the elderly patriarchal auxiliary Emmanuel Delly, who had visited Iran after the Iran-Iraq war to minister to stranded Iraqi Christian prisoners of war, was chosen as a compromise candidate. The Chaldean Church inevitably suffered during Iraq's descent into chaos in the aftermath of the American-led invasion in 2003 to oust Saddam Hussein, and its members have lived in fear ever since. The Chaldean archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk has spoken up tirelessly for the embattled Christians of Iraq, but his speeches attract little attention in America and Europe. Even the abduction and death of a Chaldean archbishop in 2008 went almost unnoticed in the wider world. Paulos Faraj Rahho, archbishop of

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Mosul, was kidnapped on 29 February 2008 and his dead body was recovered a few days later. He was in poor health, and it is not clear whether he was murdered by his captors or whether the strain of his captivity triggered his death. Rahho was the most eminent Christian victim of the lawlessness that has plagued Iraq since Saddam's downfall, but by no means the only one. He was succeeded by Emil Shem'on Nona, whose election was confirmed by the Vatican in November 2009.

One consequence of the recent violence in Iraq has been the virtual demise of monasticism in the Church of the East. The monasteries of Rabban Hormizd, Notre Dame des Semences and Mar Giwargis near Mosul, the last three bastions of historic Chaldean monasticism, continued to function for most of the twentieth century. Indeed, the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences continued to be an important centre for the copying of manuscripts well into the 1980s. The quiet, productive life enjoyed by the Chaldean monks and nuns of Iraq for nearly one and a half centuries came abruptly to an end in the 1990s. In August 2002 a Chaldean nun was murdered in her apartment in the heart of Baghdad. Since the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the countryside of northern Iraq has become too unsafe for monastic life to continue, and the three historic Chaldean monasteries near Mosul have been temporarily closed. For the time being at least, the focus of Chaldean intellectual life has shifted to the patriarchal palace in the Baghdad suburb of Dawra, where what remains of the once-impressive Chaldean manuscript collections is now housed.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION

The Assyrian Church of the East. Although the Nestorian patriarch Shem'on XIX Benjamin was murdered during the First World War, most of the bishops of the Kochanes hierarchy came through the turmoil of the war years unscathed. The exceptions were the bishops Denha of Sulduz, who was shot by the Turks in Urmia in January 1915, and Ephrem of Urmia, who vanished at about the same time and may have suffered a similar fate. Nevertheless, after the death of the *mutran* Isaac Hnanisho' in 1918 and the patriarch Shem'on XX Paul in 1920, the hierarchy of the Kochanes patriarchate consisted of a mere five bishops: the *mutran* Joseph Hnanisho'; Abimalek Timothy, metropolitan of Malabar; Zay'a Sargis, bishop of Jilu, Baz and Raikan; Yalda Yahballaha, bishop of Berwari; and Eliya Abuna, bishop of Alqosh and then Taimar. Zay'a Sargis and Yalda Yahballaha were poorly-educated Hakkari tribesmen who had inherited their offices from their uncles and had little theological training. Eliya Abuna, shocked by the consecration of an eleven-year-old patriarch, deserted the Nestorians in 1921 and rejoined

the Chaldean Church. His defection left Shemʿon XXI Eshai with only four bishops. Since he was not on speaking terms with Abimalek Timothy after 1928, and since Yalda Yahballaha was under suspension for much of his episcopate, the young patriarch had in practice only two reliable helpers, neither of whom had been elected to their offices. This pitiful hierarchy, probably the smallest ever in the long and turbulent history of the Church of the East, persisted until the end of the Second World War, as Shemʿon XXI Eshai obstinately declined to consecrate any new bishops until the Assyrians were granted their own homeland. He was presumably hoping to dramatise the plight of the Assyrian people and sway the policies of the League of Nations, but his refusal to exercise the most important of his patriarchal functions brought the Assyrian Church to the verge of extinction in the 1930s.

Abimalek Timothy died in 1945, and was succeeded as metropolitan of Malabar in 1952 by the future patriarch Thomas Darmo, who fixed his seat at Trichur. Zayʿa Sargis died in 1951, and was succeeded as bishop of Jilu, Baz and Raikan by his nephew and *natar kursya* Ishoʿ Sargis, who died in 1966. Ishoʿ was in turn succeeded in 1968 by his teenage nephew Joseph Sargis, the present Assyrian bishop of Baghdad. The bishop Yalda Yahballaha of Berwari also died in 1951, and was succeeded in 1957 by his nephew and *natar kursya* Andrew Yahballaha, who died in 1973. He was not replaced, and the historic diocese of Berwari, founded in the sixteenth century and maintained for nearly four hundred years by the succession of nephew to uncle, thus came to an end. Eliya Abuna, who had left the Assyrian Church in 1921, died in 1956. Joseph Hnanishoʿ, the greatly loved metropolitan of Shemsdin, died in 1977. In the search for his successor, tradition trumped modernity. To keep the appointment in the *mutran*'s family it was proposed to consecrate his nephew, a deacon named Bawai then living in America. Bawai declined the offer and the archdiocese of Shemsdin, also around four hundred years old, followed the diocese of Berwari into oblivion. Two other bishops were consecrated during the 1950s and early 1960s, Philip Yuhanna in 1953 for Rawanduz (with the title of Tergawar), and Dinkha Hnanya, the present patriarch, in 1962 for Teheran. Philip Yuhanna died in 1976.

A notable development during the final years of the patriarchate of Shemʿon XXI Eshai was the appointment of the first bishops to the communities of the Assyrian diaspora. Yohannan Abraham was appointed for Syria in 1968, Narsai Eliya d'Baz for Lebanon in 1971, and Aprem Hormizd Khamis for the United States and Canada in 1973. Shemʿon XXI also consecrated a metropolitan for Trichur in India in 1971, in an attempt to win over the Nestorians of the Chaldean Syrian Church from Mar Aprem Mookan, at that time one of the leading members of Mar Addai's group. In 1984 the present patriarch Dinkha IV Hnanya further

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strengthened the hierarchy of the Assyrian diaspora, consecrating Bawai Ashur Soro bishop of the Western United States and Meelis Joseph Zay'a bishop of Australia.

Since the schism of 1968 the Assyrian Church has been divided into two groups. Dinkha IV Hnanya's Assyrian Church of the East presently claims around 385,000 members, and has a hierarchy of fourteen bishops:

Dinkha IV Hnanya, catholicus-patriarch of the East (since 1976);
Giwargis Sliwa, metropolitan of Iraq and Russia (since 1981);
Meelis Joseph Zay'a, metropolitan of Australia and New Zealand (since 1984);
Aprem Mookan, metropolitan of Trichur (since 1968);
Aprem Hormizd Khamis, bishop of the Western United States (since 1973);
Joseph Sargis, bishop of Baghdad (since 1968);
Isaac Joseph, bishop of Beth Nuhadra and Russia (since 1999);
Awa Royel, bishop of California (since 2008);
Emmanuel Joseph, bishop of Canada (since 1990);
Odisho Oraham, bishop of Europe (since 1992);
Aprem Nathanael, bishop of Syria (since 1999);
Narsai Benjamin, bishop of Iran (since 2010);
Yohannan Joseph, bishop in India (since 2010); and
Awgin Kuriakose, bishop in India (since 2010).

Narsai Eliya d'Baz died in February 2010, and has not yet been replaced as metropolitan of Lebanon and Syria. The Church has also recently lost one of its most able and thoughtful bishops in sad circumstances. In 2008 Bawai Ashur Soro, who had spent the previous two decades striving for reconciliation between the Nestorian and Chaldean Churches, accused the patriarch of intransigence and left to join the Chaldean Church. He was replaced as bishop of California in the same year by Awa David Royel. Born in the United States, Awa Royel is the first bishop of the Assyrian diaspora with no direct connection with the ancient homelands of the Church of the East.

The present Assyrian ecclesiastical hierarchy reflects the changing distribution of Nestorian Christians as a result of emigration after the First World War. The Assyrian Church of the East still has many members living in Iraq (85,000) and Iran (20,000), but its greatest concentration is now in the United States. The Assyrian population of the United States, perhaps 100,000 strong, consists of a dwindling number of elderly immigrants who left Iraq after 1933 and their far more numerous children and grandchildren, who were born in the United States. Most American

Assyrians live in balmy California. There are Assyrian communities in most of the state's major cities, and outlying colonies in the neighbouring states of Arizona and Washington, in Phoenix and Seattle. The main Assyrian concentrations in California are in San Jose, San Francisco, Sacramento, Modesto, Turlock, Ceres, Tarzana and Fullerton. A substantial minority of Assyrians live in the eastern states of Michigan, Connecticut and New York, mostly in Chicago (presently the residence of the patriarch Dinkha IV) but also in New York City and Detroit.

An Assyrian community from the Urmia region settled in the town of North Battleford in Canada's Saskatchewan province shortly before the First World War, and there are presently around 20,000 Assyrians living in Canada. The largest concentration is in Toronto, but there are also small Assyrian communities in Hamilton, Windsor, London, Montreal, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon and Vancouver. There are also significant Assyrian groups in Australia and New Zealand (25,000), principally in Sydney and Wellington; and in Europe (30,000), mainly in the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark. Around 50,000 Assyrians live in Russia, Armenia and Georgia, descendants of the Nestorians who migrated to Georgia in the second half of the eighteenth century and to Yerevan in the 1820s, and of the Assyrian refugees from Urmia who sought shelter there during the First World War. A large Assyrian community can be found in the Georgian capital Tbilisi (Tiflis), and there are smaller communities in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Rostov, Kiev and other cities. The Assyrian settlement at Koylassar near Yerevan, founded in 1828, continues to thrive. There is also a substantial Assyrian diaspora in the Middle East outside Iraq and Iran, principally in Syria (25,000) and Lebanon (5,000), and a small Assyrian community in Cyprus. Finally, the Assyrian Church of the East can claim around 30,000 members in India, in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, in the capital New Delhi, and in Mumbai (Bombay). These communities belong to the 'Chaldean Syrian Church' founded by Abimelek Timothy in 1908. However, the vast majority of the Christians of the Malabar Coast who were once dependent on the Church of the East are now either Syrian Orthodox or Catholics.

The Ancient Church of the East. The so-called 'Ancient Church of the East', established in 1968 by Thomas Darmo during his rebellion against Shem'on XXI Eshai, continues to survive against the odds. With far fewer members than the Assyrian Church of the East and lacking its institutional legitimacy, the Ancient Church has struggled throughout its half-century existence, first under Thomas Darmo and since 1972 under his successor Addai II Giwargis. Indeed, few outsiders expected that the schism would last so long. The Ancient Church, significantly, does not include the word 'Assyrian' in its title, and has deliberately

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positioned itself as the true heir of the old Church of the East. It has always had a small hierarchy, and lost its most visible spokesman when the metropolitan Aprem of Trichur defected to the Assyrian Church a few years ago. Its few bishops, like their Assyrian counterparts, are stationed both in Iraq and among the Assyrians of the diaspora, though the Ancient Church does not at present have a bishop in Iran. The Ancient Church of the East presently claims around 60,000 members. Two of its bishops, Aprem Dawood of Nuhadra and Emmanuel Eliya of the United States and Canada, have recently resigned, and the Church presently has a hierarchy of six bishops:

Addai II Giwargis, catholicus-patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East (since 1972);

Narsai Thomas, metropolitan of Kirkuk (since 1993);

Thomas Giwargis Soro, metropolitan of Mosul (since 1972);

Timothy Shallita Yahballaha, metropolitan of Europe (with residence in Mainz);

Daniel Ya'qob, bishop of California; and

Ya'qob Daniel, bishop of Australia and New Zealand.

The Chaldean Church. Many of the Chaldean dioceses suffered terrible hardship and persecution during the First World War. In 1928, according to an official Vatican statistic, the Chaldean Church had fewer than 44,000 members, compared with over 101,000 in 1913. The dioceses of Kirkuk and Sehna had roughly the same population as they did in 1913, but most of the other Chaldean dioceses were reduced by more than 50 percent. In the patriarchal archdiocese of Mosul, the largest of the Chaldean dioceses, there were only 18,350 Chaldeans in 1928, compared with just under 32,000 in 1913. In the dioceses of Van, Amid, Seert, Gazarta, Mardin and Salmas, the losses were catastrophic. These six dioceses could muster only 4,500 Chaldeans in 1928, compared with 33,840 in 1913. In one diocese only, Zakho, the Chaldean population actually rose, but only because a substantial influx of Assyrian refugees, who were counted as Chaldeans for the purposes of the survey, more than counterbalanced a fall in the indigenous Christian population. On the face of it, these figures are a testimony to disaster; but there is good reason to believe that they are unduly pessimistic. In 1937, according to a statistic compiled by the Chaldean patriarchal vicar Stephen Kajo, the population of the Chaldean Church was just over 140,000, more than three times higher than the figure recorded in 1928.

Kajo's 1937 figures, though probably slightly exaggerated, are far more plausible than the gloomy 1928 figures, and it is easy to see why the Vatican got

it so badly wrong seven years earlier. The 1928 estimate was made under very difficult circumstances. Perhaps 15,000 Chaldeans had perished during the First World War. Many thousands more had been displaced from their homes, and had either emigrated to Europe and the United States or were scattered around the larger cities of the Middle East. Many of these urban refugees were overlooked in the 1928 statistics, because they did not include the Chaldean vicariates. The Chaldean populations of Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus and Beirut were considerably higher in 1928 than they had been in 1913. At the same time, Kajo's figures for 1937 included a large number of nominal Chaldeans. His statistics counted as Chaldean not only the traditional pre-1914 Chaldean villages, but also a number of villages in the dioceses of Mosul, 'Amadiya, 'Aqra and Zakho settled after 1918 by Assyrian refugees from the Hakkari region. Most of these refugees were Nestorians, who had sorted themselves out into their old village communities once they recovered from the trauma of dislocation. If their village priest had survived the First World War, they remained Nestorians. If they no longer had a priest, the Chaldean Church generously supplied one; and in such cases the refugees were numbered as Chaldeans by Kajo. Given their circumstances, most of them probably did not mind being counted as Catholics, and there were certainly also a number of genuine conversions to Catholicism.

Table 4: Population of the Chaldean Church, 1937

<i>Diocese</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Priests</i>	<i>Believers</i>
Baghdad and Basra	6	13	29,578
Mosul	24	40	44,314
Kirkuk	8	18	7,620
Zakho	16	18	10,852
'Amadiya	16	17	5,457
'Aqra	13	5	2,779
Urmia	-	-	6,000
Salmas	-	4	3,350
Sehna	2	5	1,932
Amid	1	1	315
Mardin	1	1	400
Seert	0	0	3,500
Gazarta	1	1	2,250
Syria	2	11	3,107
Vicariates	8	14	9,177
Emigration	0	4	9,889
<i>Total</i>	98	163	140,720

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Thanks to these Assyrian reinforcements, the population of the Chaldean Church was higher in 1937 than it had been in 1913. Nevertheless, the Church had suffered heavy losses in its western dioceses during the First World War, and these losses were reflected in a number of changes in its traditional episcopal hierarchy. Ya'qob Awgin Manna, the patriarchal administrator of the diocese of Van, fled from his diocese when the killings began in 1915. Although most of the victims of the massacres in the Van district were Armenians, the Turks and their Kurdish allies also killed Nestorian and Chaldean Christians as well, and the Chaldean diocese of Van lapsed at the end of the war. The archbishops Addai Scher of Seert and Philip Ya'qob Abraham of Gazarta were both murdered by the Turks in 1915, and neither diocese was revived after the war. In 1929 the Chaldean archdiocese of Amid lapsed on the death of its last archbishop, Shlemun Mushe al-Sabbagh. In 1930 the old diocese of Salmas was joined with the archdiocese of Urmia, established in 1890. New arrangements were also made for the growing Chaldean diaspora in Syria and Lebanon. A single patriarchal vicariate of Syria was created for the Chaldean communities of Aleppo, Damascus, Deir al-Zor and Alexandretta, which replaced the three prewar Syrian vicariates. A new Chaldean diocese of Syria and Lebanon was also created for the postwar Assyrian and Chaldean settlements in the Khabur valley and for the Chaldeans of Beirut. The first bishop of Syria and Lebanon was Gabriel Na'mo, who sat from 1939 to 1957 at Aleppo. In total, there were around 6,400 Chaldeans living in Syria and Lebanon in 1937.

At the start of the Second World War the Chaldean patriarch resided in Baghdad, and his episcopate consisted of four archdioceses (Kirkuk, Sehna, Urmia-Salmas and Basra) and six dioceses (ʿAmadiya, ʿAqra, Mardin, Mosul, Syria and Lebanon, and Zakho). There were also patriarchal vicariates for Syria, Turkey and Egypt. The diocese of Mardin lapsed in 1941 after the death of the bishop Israel Audo. In 1957 the diocese of Syria and Lebanon was broken up. A new diocese of Aleppo was created for Syria, while the Chaldeans of Beirut were given a coadjutor, with the titular rank of bishop and the right of succession. In 1960 a new diocese was created for Alqosh. In 1962 Baghdad was placed under a patriarchal auxiliary, with the titular rank of bishop. In January 1966 an archdiocese was established for Ahwaz in southern Iran, where a significant number of Chaldeans were employed in the oil industry. In 1968 Erbil was detached from the archdiocese of Kirkuk and its ancient status as an archdiocese was revived. In 1971 the archdiocese of Sehna was renamed Teheran. This change reflected a decision taken three decades earlier by the archbishop Joseph Cheikho of Sehna, who moved his seat to Teheran in 1944 in recognition of the steady growth of the Chaldean population of the Iranian capital.

In recent years depopulation due to the migration of Chaldeans from the countryside to the greater security of the cities has begun to threaten the viability of the dioceses of Erbil, ʿAqra and Zakho. There was a five-year vacancy in the archdiocese of Erbil after the death of the archbishop Yaʿqob Scher in 2005, which has only recently been filled with the appointment of Bashar Warda as archbishop of Erbil in July 2010. The diocese of ʿAqra has been without a bishop for ten years since the death of ʿAbdalahad Rabban in 1999, and the few remaining Chaldeans in the ʿAqra district are now under the care of an apostolic administrator. There was a fourteen-year vacancy in the diocese of Zakho after the death of Stephen Kajo in 1987, and the diocese has again fallen vacant after the bishop Peter al-Harboli, consecrated for Zakho in 2001, died after a brief illness in November 2010.

Until recently the Chaldean Church did not appoint bishops for its diaspora, preferring to administer them through patriarchal vicars. This policy gradually changed after the Second World War, reflecting the growing importance of the Chaldean communities beyond the Church's heartland in Iran and Iraq. The patriarchal vicariate of Turkey was replaced in 1966 by a diocese at Istanbul, with the title of Diyarbakir, though this diocese has been vacant since 2005 after the death of its incumbent Paul Karatash. In 1980 the patriarchal vicariate of Egypt was also replaced by a diocese at Cairo. The 60,000 or more Chaldeans living in the United States form by far the largest diaspora group, and are now represented by two bishops. Ibrahim Ibrahim was consecrated for the Eastern United States in 1982, and Sarhad Joseph Jammo for the Western United States in 2002. Their dioceses, named respectively after Saint Thomas and Saint Peter, are based in Detroit and San Diego. In October 2006 an archdiocese was established in Sydney for the Chaldeans of Australia and New Zealand, replacing the former patriarchal vicariate of Australia. The first archbishop of Sydney, Gabriel Kassab, was formerly archbishop of Basra.

There are eighteen bishops in the present Chaldean hierarchy:

Emmanuel III Delly, patriarch of Babylon (since 2003);
 Emil Shemʿon Nona, archbishop of Mosul (since 2009);
 Louis Sako, archbishop of Kirkuk (since 2002);
 Bashar Warda, archbishop of Erbil (since 2010);
 Ramzi Garmo, archbishop of Teheran (since 1999);
 Thomas Meram, archbishop of Urmia and Salmas (since 1973);
 Yohannan Zora, archbishop of Ahwaz (since 1974);
 Gabriel Kassab, archbishop of Sydney (since 2006);
 Yaʿqob Ishaq, titular archbishop of Nisibis (since 2005);

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Andrew Abuna, titular archbishop of Hirta (since 2003);
Mikha Pola Maqdassi, bishop of Alqosh (since 2001);
Antoine Audo, bishop of Aleppo (since 1992);
Joseph Sarraf, bishop of Cairo (since 1984);
Michael Kassari, bishop of Lebanon (since 2001);
Rabban Al-Qas, bishop of ʿAmadiya (since 2001);
Ibrahim Ibrahim, archbishop of the Eastern United States (since 1982);
Sarhad Joseph Jammo, bishop of the Western United States (since 2002);
and
Shlemon Warduni, patriarchal auxiliary of Baghdad (since 2001).

The latest relatively reliable statistics for the Chaldean Church date from 1995, when it claimed a total membership of just under 286,000 members, of whom 150,000 lived in Baghdad and its environs, 21,000 in the Mosul region, 16,000 in the Erbil and Kirkuk regions, 4,000 in southern Iraq, 6,000 in Iran, 29,000 in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Egypt, and 60,000 in the United States. These statistics reflected the abnormal conditions prevailing in the wake of the First Gulf War, when tens of thousands of Chaldeans left the countryside of northern Iraq for the comparative security of Baghdad. In happier times, there would have been far more Chaldeans living in and around Mosul, Erbil and Kirkuk. Although these figures are only fifteen years old, the turmoil following the American-led invasion in Iraq in 2003 has already made them obsolete, at least as regards the number and distribution of Chaldean Christians in Iraq; but they have not yet been superseded by better ones. At present estimates of the membership of the Chaldean Church range from around 400,000 to 650,000. Most Chaldeans still live in Iraq, though the proportion is now somewhat lower than it was in 1995. By the same token, the Chaldean diaspora has grown considerably since 1995, though it is difficult to assign precise numbers to the diaspora Churches.

LITERATURE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Assyrian and Chaldean Literature and Scholarship. The twentieth century saw a flowering of Modern Syriac literature, particularly in Urmia. Little of this literature was specifically Christian, and much of it was devoted to Assyrian nationalism. The disasters of the First World War and the movement for the recovery of the lost ancestral homelands created the conditions for the growth of a committed Assyrian literature both in Iraq and Iran. Much of the literature produced by nationalist writers has been shrill and bombastic. In one popular history of

Assyria, the Babylonian queen Semiramis congratulated her 'Assyrian' soldiers in the wake of a victory: 'Beloved Assyrian youths, I wish that you were all just one single man, so that I might embrace him, press him to my breast, and kiss him on his mouth.' She then ordered the Assyrian flag to be brought to her, and kissed that instead. Such depressing scenes were doubtless influenced by the kind of patriotic fustian popular in Europe before the First World War. In Europe, however, it soon fell from fashion after 1918, except in the Fascist and Communist dictatorships. In Iraq and Iran, sadly, it still seems to be popular. Rudolf Macuch, in an important survey in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, tactfully refrained from appraising the quality of modern Assyrian literature, remarking merely that it has 'liberated itself from the narrow religious frame in which it was predominantly kept in the past'. Indeed, some fine work has already been produced, notably William Daniel's three-volume epic poem *The Hero Qatina* (*Qatina ganbara*), published in Teheran between 1961 and 1965; and eventually the overall standard will improve. There is no reason why modern Assyrian writers should not rival the literary achievements of the Church of the East during its great days; and they are sure to produce more work of lasting value as soon as they find more attractive themes than the grievances of the Assyrian nation.

The emergence of a distinctive Assyrian literature during the twentieth century was accompanied by further advances in Assyrian and Chaldean scholarship. Several eminent Chaldean scholars, following in the footsteps of Addai Scher, shed important light on the history of the Chaldean Church. The reputation of Alphonse Mingana has inevitably been tarnished by his ill-judged attempt to forge a respectable provenance for the *Chronicle of Erbil*, but before he fell from grace he was considered to be one of the most able Chaldean scholars of the twentieth century. Mingana, a Chaldean priest from the Zakho district in northern Iraq who worked in England for much of the interwar period, wrote and published extensively on both Christian and Muslim themes. His studies of the Church of the East included an edition of the debate between the patriarch Timothy I and the caliph al-Mahdi on the rival claims of Islam and Christianity (first published in Manchester in 1928 and recently reprinted by Gorgias Press), and important articles on the missionary work of the Church of the East in India and in Central Asia and China. In the 1920s he amassed a collection of around 950 Syriac and Christian Arabic manuscripts and 2,000 Islamic manuscripts, now held in Birmingham, and his catalogue of the Christian manuscripts in this 'Mingana collection', published in three volumes between 1933 and 1939, remains a towering work of scholarship. Other important scholarly advances were made by the bishop Stephane Bello, who wrote an important article in 1939 that disentangled the turbulent events of Yohannan Hormizd's reign; and by Joseph

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Habbi, who demonstrated beyond doubt in 1966 that Sulaqa and his supporters had misled the Vatican, and that the schism of 1552 had been a revolt against the reigning patriarch Shem'on VII Isho'yahb. Mention should also be made of Butrus Haddad, who was a leading figure in the drive to catalogue the thousands of Syriac manuscripts in Iraq that had escaped the notice of earlier scholars. His 1988 Arabic catalogue of the Chaldean Church's Syriac manuscripts went far beyond the territory mapped by earlier scholars, and has given twenty-first century researchers access to a much wider range of manuscripts than their nineteenth-century predecessors knew.

One of the best recent histories of the Assyrians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is John Joseph's *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbours*, originally published in 1961. Joseph, as any scholar of integrity is bound to do, rejected the myth of Assyrian origins, and was in consequence pilloried by the more excitable Assyrian nationalists. He was also abused for using the convenient descriptive term 'Nestorian'. The book has recently been updated and reissued under a slightly less provocative title. All scholars of the Church of the East also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to George Kiraz, the founder of the admirable Gorgias Press, which specialises in reprinting key texts that could only previously be consulted in specialist libraries. Nearly all the classic texts on the Church of the East and its literature can now be found in handsome reprints, and the list of titles available continues to grow at an astonishing rate. The Press has also published a number of books by modern Assyrian scholars, some of which lack critical judgement, but with these unfortunate exceptions the quality of its output remains very high.

One welcome by-product of the Assyrian nationalist literary movement has been the emergence of a number of academic and popular venues for scholarship on the Church of the East by the Assyrians themselves. By far the best of these journals is the online journal *Hugoye*, which regularly features contributions from leading scholars in the field of Syriac Studies. Many of the articles in the *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society* are also of high quality, and valuable information can often be found in more popular journals such as *Nineveh* and its online counterpart *Zinda*. These publications are helping to preserve an oral history of the Assyrians of Iraq and Iran that goes back well beyond the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Assyrians have a very tenacious community memory, and it may well be possible to fill in some of the tantalising gaps in the history of the Church of the East between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries by a close analysis of these community traditions. The Assyrian historian Solomon Solomon has already shown what can be done in this field in a series of articles in *Nineveh*, in which he has recorded the family traditions associated with the

Nestorian settlements in Jilu, Shemsdin, Taimar and several other districts. In the age of the internet, this kind of history can now be done more productively than ever. Enthusiasts from all over the world—Europeans, Americans, Saint Thomas Christians from India and Assyrians from Iraq, Iran and the diaspora communities—are presently engaged in hammering out in the contested pages of WikiProject Assyria an agreed myth of the past, as history has famously been defined. Discussion, in the worst traditions of the Church of the East (and Wikipedia), is frequently intemperate and rancorous, but there are sometimes rewards for scholars. One Wikipedia contributor, a member of the family of the *mutrans* of Shemsdin, has recently supplied some interesting details of the careers of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century metropolitans of Shemsdin, shedding new light on an obscure period in the history of the Kochanes patriarchate.

Western Scholarship. In Europe and America, scholars have continued to build on the great achievements of the nineteenth century. In recent decades there has been a welcome growth of academic interest in the history of the eastern Roman Empire and its conflicts with Sasanian Persia, and also in the experiences of Christians living under Muslim rule. Scholarship on the Church of the East has benefited from both developments. Several important books on Christianity in the eastern Roman Empire have also helped to illuminate the life of the Nestorians just across the border in Persia. Notable recent contributions in this area include Michael Whitby's *The Emperor Maurice and His Historian* (1988), which helps to make sense of the Greek historian Theophylact Simocatta's account of the Roman campaigns against the Persians in the late 570s, in which the bishop and future patriarch Isho'yahb of Arzun spied on Maurice's forces; Andrew Palmer's *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier* (1990), a study of the early history of the Jacobite monastery of Qartmin in the Tur 'Abdin; and Elizabeth Fowden's *The Barbarian Plain* (1999), which examines the cult of the Christian warrior saint Sergius in both the Roman and Sasanian Empires. Two of the most valuable recent books on Christians living under Muslim rule are Jane Dammen McAuliffe's *Qur'anic Christians* (1991), an analysis of how successive generations of Muslim exegetes have interpreted the Qur'anic verses that mention the 'people of the book'; and *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (2008), a fascinating study by Sidney Griffith of Christian responses to Muslim rule during the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphates. Griffith is particularly good on the 'literature of debate' that emerged in the eighth century and persisted well into the Seljuq period.

Much of the best work since the end of the First World War has been done by Catholic scholars, often with links to the Chaldean Church. Cardinal Eugène Tisserant's authoritative article *Église nestorienne*, published in the *Dictionnaire de*

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Théologie Catholique in 1931, remains to this day by far the best general introduction to the history of the Church of the East. Tisserant warned against placing too much reliance in the *Chronicle of Erbil* decades before its provenance was first challenged, and here as elsewhere his judgements remain convincing eighty years after they were first made. A companion article published in 1934, *Église malabare*, gave an equally authoritative history of the Saint Thomas Christians of India, and was just as dismissive of their own origin myths. The Belgian Dominican Jacques-Marie Vosté, who was active during the interwar period and the 1940s, catalogued the Syriac manuscripts held by the Chaldean Church in 'Aqra, Kirkuk and the monastery of Notre Dame des Semences, wrote well-sourced biographies of Yohannan Sulaqa and Khidr of Mosul, and when he died in 1949 was well on the way to completing an edition of Isho'dad of Merv, subsequently published in part by a collaborator. More recently the French twins Christelle and Florence Jullien have made a number of fine studies of the early history of the Church of the East, including a fascinating appraisal of the reliability (or rather unreliability) of the *Chronicle of Erbil*. Although most of their books and articles are in French, they have also written several admirable articles in English in the *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

The late Jean-Maurice Fiey, a French Dominican missionary who lived for many years in Iraq, wrote several important historical studies of the Church of the East under Sasanian, Arab and Mongol rule. He also established the whereabouts of hundreds of Nestorian villages and monasteries in Iran and Iraq in a series of brilliant studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s. Fiey's researches firmly established the historical topography of the Church of the East in its Mesopotamian heartland. Further important contributions were made in this field by Jean Dauvillier, who examined the evidence for the spread of Nestorian Christianity in the 'exterior provinces', and by Michel Chevalier, who analysed a wide range of historical references to the Nestorian and Chaldean communities in Kurdistan in his influential 1985 book, *Les montagnards chrétiens du Hakkari et du Kurdistan Septentrional*. Several years ago the work of these French giants was synthesised by the present author in his book *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913*, which took Fiey's work a stage further with the inclusion of nearly 2,000 colophons from various sources that had not been available to the master. Much work still remains to be done in this field, however, and the establishment of an online database of Nestorian and Chaldean manuscript colophons would be a very welcome first step towards compiling all the available evidence and making it accessible to scholars.

Important advances have also been made by other writers in what might loosely be termed the 'Protestant' camp. Scholars have long lamented the lack of a reliable general history of the Church of the East in English, but two recently

published books have gone a long way towards filling this gap. For most of the twentieth century the general reader had to be content with William Ainger Wigram's *The Assyrians and Their Neighbours* (1929) and Aubrey Vine's *The Nestorian Churches* (1937). Both books have dated badly. Wigram's *Assyrians*, written in the breezy, discursive style he had earlier employed in his 1910 *Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church*, devoted too many pages to a recapitulation of nineteen bloodstained centuries of Middle Eastern history. Although his digressions on Genghis Khan and Timur Leng placed the Church of the East in an important historical context, they also left the author insufficient space to do full justice to his main theme. The book's chief interest today is that Wigram was an early champion of the notion that the modern Nestorians and Chaldeans were descended from the ancient Assyrians. This stance has endeared him to modern Assyrians and ensured that his books are still read, at least by members of the Assyrian diaspora. Aubrey Vine was more interested in theology than in the history of the Mongol conquests or the eccentric theory of Assyrian origins, and gave more space than Wigram to his main topic. But his book had a curious structure. No scholar nowadays would begin a history of the Church of the East with a description of the fifth-century Nestorian controversy, ignoring the first four centuries of the Persian Church's existence and portraying it as the guardian of the Nestorian heresy. The book also contained too many avoidable errors. Although Vine sympathetically described the plight of the Nestorians in the interwar period, and also gave a useful description of the ceremonies and rituals of the modern Nestorian Church, his list of classical Nestorian dioceses, written nearly four decades after the publication of the *Synodicon Orientale*, was sadly muddled.

Nevertheless, it took nearly seven decades for Wigram and Vine's histories to be replaced by something better. In 2003 the Austrian scholars Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar Winkler published *The Church of the East: A Concise History*, an English translation of a book originally written in German, and in 2006 Christoph Baumer published *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*. Baum and Winkler's book is informed by modern scholarship, contains valuable information and a very helpful bibliography, and is an indispensable tool for researchers. But it is a little dry for the taste of most general readers, and the authors have also been let down by the poor quality of the English translation. As a result, the book will probably be more often consulted than read. By contrast, Baumer's well-written, well-sourced and splendidly-illustrated book is a joy to read. It has been enthusiastically welcomed by Western scholars, and hailed as 'much the best available general history of the Church of the East'. The present volume, which devotes more space to themes passed lightly over by Baumer and

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less to those that he has already treated in detail, was written not to supplant *The Church of the East* but to complement it.

A number of important specialist studies have also been written. Erica Hunter has helped to elucidate the Nestorian missions in Central Asia, bringing some much-needed precision and discipline to this sprawling field of research. Heleen Murre-van den Berg has focused on the relatively neglected Ottoman period, writing on the confused patriarchal succession after the schism of 1552, the authors of the Alqosh and Urmia schools, and the rich manuscript tradition of the Church of the East. Her recent study of the help given to the American missionaries at Urmia by a number of Nestorian priests and deacons provides a salutary reminder that not all of the credit for the rediscovery of the Church of the East's heritage in the nineteenth century should go to European and American scholars, crucial though their contribution was. Chip Coakley's fine study of the Anglican mission, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, vividly recreates a fascinating period in the history of Christian missions. All modern-day Assyrians and Chaldeans should read this book, as it scotches the notion that the missionaries—whether Catholic or Protestant—were malign instruments of Western cultural imperialism. Finally, the immense contribution made by Sebastian Brock to the scholarship of the Church of the East must be mentioned. His interests range widely across all the Syriac-speaking Churches in all periods of their history. He has written authoritatively on Ephrem the Syrian, Aphrahat and other early writers; on the origins of Sasanian Christianity; on women in the Church of the East; on liturgy; and on manuscripts, martyrs, monks and monasteries. In one of his most important articles he has demonstrated that the Church of the East, whatever its enemies might have claimed, was not Nestorian, and that the adjective 'Nestorian', if used in a derogatory sense, is 'a lamentable misnomer'. Many of his Oxford students, including the present writer, have pursued in later life the interest in Syriac Christianity that he first kindled; and he was justly saluted in a recent *festschrift* from his many admirers as *malfono w'rafo d'malfone*, 'teacher and chief of the teachers'.

Nevertheless, much work remains to be done before the achievement of the Church of the East can be properly appreciated. Although G. J. Reinink has begun to publish a translation of the *Garden of Delights* (*gannat bussame*), an anonymous commentary on the Gospel lessons of the liturgical cycle variously dated to the tenth or the thirteenth century, major Nestorian authors such as Yohannan bar Zob'i, Khamis bar Qardahe and Giwargis Warda still await their editors, and the works of several later authors still exist only in manuscript. Some important texts are still available only in their original Syriac or Arabic, or at best in a Latin translation. When these translations were made, more than a century ago, all

educated Europeans could read them; but the sharp decline in the fortunes of Latin during the twentieth century has now made Mari's *History of the Eastern Patriarchs* and other key sources almost inaccessible except to specialists. As Lucas Van Rompay has recently pointed out, one of the most striking indications of the scale of the task ahead is that, after four centuries of serious study in Europe and America, there is still no reliable, up-to-date and readable study of the Syriac and Arabic literature of the Church of the East in English. Two surveys in English, William Wright's *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (1894) and de Lacy O'Leary's *The Syriac Church and Fathers* (1909), are useful as far as the Church's literature in Syriac is concerned, but both are badly out of date. Wright's book is also so dry as to be almost unreadable. The standard reference work, Anton Baumstark's formidable *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (1922), was also written in an unnecessarily difficult style, and perhaps for that reason has not yet been translated from its original German. Although no substitute for Baumstark, perhaps the most attractive introduction to the subject presently available is Duval's *La littérature syriaque* (1907), which has the great virtue of being readable. Sebastian Brock's *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* provides a short but excellent introduction to the treasures of Syriac literature, while Cardinal Tisserant's discussion of Nestorian literature in his article *Église nestorienne*, which covers authors writing in Arabic as well as those who wrote in Syriac, is also very helpful. However, most of these studies tail off in the fourteenth century, and the only serious survey of Syriac literature during the 'dark centuries' and from the sixteenth century to the present day is Rudolf Macuch's *Geschichte der spät- und neu-syrischen Literatur* (1976). Individual Syriac writers, particularly the fourth-century masters Ephrem and Aphrahat, have been the subject of numerous books during the twentieth century, the best of which are Robert Murray's influential *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (1975) and Sebastian Brock's *The Luminous Eye* (1992). In recent years there has also been a gratifying growth of interest in Hunain ibn Ishaq, 'Abdallah ibn al-Tayyib and other authors who wrote in Arabic. All the same, important Nestorian texts in both Syriac and Arabic have not yet been translated into European languages, more manuscripts are being discovered, and the need for a full-length reappraisal of the literature of the Church of the East is becoming ever more pressing.

Studies of Syriac Christianity in India and China. There is now no shortage of books on the Saint Thomas Christians of India, but their quality often leaves much to be desired. Each of the successor Churches that presently divide the allegiance of the Christians of the Malabar Coast has been understandably anxious to publish its own version of the history of the past four centuries. This tradition goes back at least as far as 1720, when the Indian priest Mattai Veticutel wrote a

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history of the Malabar Church in Syriac which retailed all the usual legends but also provided valuable information that might otherwise have been lost. Most modern publications broadly agree on the history of the Indian Church up to the suppression of the old Nestorian metropolitan province of India at the synod of Diamper in 1599, though in recent years there has been a tendency, unsupported by any historical evidence, to exaggerate the role of the native Indian clergy and downplay the dependence of the Malabar Church on the patriarchate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. After 1599, however, the historian enters a minefield. Even where the facts are not in dispute, the successor Churches have rarely agreed on their interpretation. It does not help matters that many of the books published during the twentieth century were written by writers more concerned to settle scores with their rivals than to pursue historical truth. Some recent studies, notably K Samir's discussion of the visit to India in 1701 by the Chaldean metropolitan Shem'on of 'Ada, have brought valuable new facts to light and have been conducted in accordance with the highest standards of scholarship. Most books on the Indian Christians, alas, fall far below these standards. Shrill, partisan and unreliable, they serve only to convince readers whose minds are already made up. For the moment, Cardinal Tisserant's authoritative article *Église malabare*, published in French in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* in 1934, remains by far the most trustworthy history of the Saint Thomas Christians. This fine study was updated and translated into English by E R Hambye in 1957, under the title *Eastern Christianity in India*. The two volumes of Stephen Neill's *A History of Christianity in India* also provide an absorbing account of the history of the Indian Church. Neill, an Anglican bishop who governed the Indian diocese of Tinnevely for many years, was a well-informed and thoughtful writer, whose *magnum opus* has won deserved praise. The first volume of Neill's work is particularly valuable for the history of the Malabar Christians when India was a province of the Church of the East.

The first three decades of the twentieth century were a period in which the Nestorian presence in China was studied with great enthusiasm. A major stimulus to this study was the discovery at Tun-huang, among Buddhist and Manichean manuscripts from the T'ang dynasty, of a number of Nestorian texts from the same period. These finds corroborated many of the inferences which had been drawn by scholars from the inscription on the Sian Tablet. The period, too, offered unrivalled opportunities for scholars to travel in China and to carry out historical research. A small but dedicated band of scholars, mostly Christians, often Christian priests and missionaries too, sometimes romantics, achieved remarkable results in unearthing evidence for the Nestorian mission in China in both the T'ang and Yuan dynasties. Chinese local histories and gazeteers, mostly untranslated, were combed diligently for chance references to Christian administrators and

Christian monasteries in China. Nestorian tombstones from the Yuan dynasty were discovered in most of China's major cities. A major collection of bronze Nestorian crosses of the Yuan period was accumulated by a British postmaster-general of Peking, whose work gave him access to the territory where the Christian Ongut had once lived. The great names of this period are those of Paul Pelliot, the French archaeologist who made the Tun-huang discoveries; Yoshiro Sacki, a Japanese scholar who was both a Christian and an expert on Chinese history, who first interpreted the inscription on the Sian Tablet in the light of its historical background and used his position in the interwar years to gain access to finds in Japanese-occupied China and to translate and comment on the Tun-huang manuscripts; and the *doyen* of studies of the Nestorians in China, A C Moule, a Christian priest with an enviable command of Chinese and a temperamental reluctance to press the evidence too far. Moule's *Christians in China before the Year 1550*, published in 1930, set a new tone: it was a model of sobriety.

For although much gold was found in these years, there was also much dross. Perhaps this was inevitable. Most of the men who laboured to hunt down the traces of the Nestorians in China were Christian missionaries. Convinced that China could be conquered for Christ, they were unwilling to believe that the Christian missions to China in the T'ang and the Yuan dynasties had been largely ineffectual. Evidence was strained wherever possible to justify a more optimistic appraisal. Buddhist pagodas were claimed as Nestorian monasteries on no other evidence than a vaguely suggestive name. The hunters were helped by a peculiarity of the Chinese language. The Chinese character for the figure ten is cross-shaped, so the Chinese word for 'cross' is *shih tzu*, literally 'the figure ten'. The same term can also mean 'the ten words'. Exploiting such ambiguities, one enthusiastic Christian researcher claimed a Buddhist 'monastery of the ten words' (the name referred to a ten-word Buddhist maxim clearly displayed inside the monastery) as a former Christian monastery simply on the grounds that its name, *shih tzu ssu*, could also mean 'the monastery of the cross'. Several such 'monasteries of the cross' were discovered in various parts of China, but the evidence for their authenticity rarely bears close scrutiny. The missionaries also tried to appropriate the historical memory of the people of northern China. Eager anthropologists fed leading questions to puzzled Mongolian herdsmen and, wrenching their answers ingeniously out of context, claimed them as the descendants of the Nestorian Christians of the fourteenth century. Surprisingly, the searchers missed the most intriguing sighting of all, which took place in Tonkin during the Sino-French War (1884–5). In February 1885, at the siege of Tuyen Quang, the French discovered that some of the Chinese dead had red crosses painted on their chests. Most of the Chinese troops at Tuyen Quang had been recruited in Yunnan province.

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Were they, perhaps, descendants of the late-thirteenth-century Nestorian settlers mentioned by Marco Polo?

Moule's book was a necessary corrective to this intemperate enthusiasm. He can hardly be said to have ushered in a reaction, as the Communist victory in the 1949 Chinese civil war deprived charlatans and scholars alike of the opportunity of making further discoveries, while the closure of the missions in China removed much of the motivation for further study. Little work was done in the three following decades, though an important article was published in 1962 by F S Drake of the University of Hong Kong on the Nestorian crosses discovered in the Ongut country. China again opened its doors in 1979, and interest in its Christian heritage has slowly resumed. Mystics and realists are once again locked in conflict. In 2001 the surviving Nestorian texts from T'ang China were praised for their supposed fusion of Christian and Taoist doctrines in *The Jesus Sutras*, a pleasant New Age fantasy by Martin Palmer. The Nestorian missionaries in China, Palmer claimed, had artfully crafted a message that blended Eastern and Western spiritualism and merged Christ into Buddha. In fact, they had done nothing of the sort. As the Sian Tablet inscription demonstrates, they were orthodox Christians who pointedly distinguished themselves from both the Taoists and the Buddhists. Several years later Michael Keevak riposted with *The Story of a Stele*, a sober and perceptive study of the impact of the discovery of the Sian Tablet in 1625 on European attitudes to China. The Christian texts from China, he argues, have always lent themselves to starry-eyed or perverse misreadings, and no doubt always will. Valuable contributions to the study of the Nestorians in China have also been made in recent decades by the archaeologists who unearthed the royal palace of the fourteenth-century Ongut ruler Giwargis in 1990, and by the scholars who have patiently deciphered the Syriac, Arabic, Uighur, Mongol, Turkish and Chinese inscriptions on the Christian tombstones that continue to turn up on Chinese building sites. These discoveries are slowly but surely adding to the sum of our knowledge, and Moule would be delighted to know that his *Christians in China* would be twice as long if it were published today. The time is now ripe for a scholarly reappraisal of the Nestorian missions in T'ang and Yuan China, both in their specific Chinese context and as an aspect of the wider missionary enterprise of the Church of the East. The present author, who has lived for many years in China and, like the eighth-century Nestorian metropolitan Adam, reads both Syriac, Arabic and Chinese, plans to devote his next book to this fascinating topic.

AFTERWORD

If the official statistics of the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches can be trusted, there are around a million Nestorian and Chaldean Christians living around the globe today, plus or minus the odd 100,000. The Chaldean Church was credited with around 400,000 members by Wilhelm Baum and Dieter Winkler in 2003, and with around 650,000 members by Christoph Baumer in 2006. Perhaps it has around 550,000 members in truth. The Assyrian Church of the East, on the other hand, claims a mere 385,000 members. If Mar Addai's 60,000 supporters are added to this figure, there are just under 450,000 Assyrian Christians. Both sets of figures are probably slightly exaggerated, but there is no reason to doubt that the Assyrian and Chaldean population is considerably larger today than it was a century ago. Despite the disasters of the First World War and the sufferings endured by the Christian minorities in Iraq and Iran in the second half of the twentieth century, the two branches of the old Church of the East now boast around four times as many members as they did in 1913. It is also clear that, after nearly five centuries of competition, the Chaldeans have at last overtaken their Nestorian rivals. Chaldean Christians can be justly proud of the steady progress that their Church has made in the face of opposition and persecution. At the same time, although the Assyrian Church is now smaller than the Chaldean Church, it too can congratulate itself on its recovery after one of the most disastrous centuries in its history.

The implications of these figures are striking. On the face of it, the Church of the East has begun to reverse the relentless process of attrition that began shortly after the Arab conquest. For perhaps the first time in thirteen centuries, its numbers have begun to grow. Unfortunately, the growth in the number of Assyrian and Chaldean Christians owes little to an easing of Muslim pressure in the Church's historic hearlands. In America, Europe and Australia, the diasporas of both Churches are flourishing; but in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, the indigenous Christians are still treated as second-class citizens by the Muslim majority. Certainly, there are now maybe twice as many Assyrians and Chaldeans living in Iraq and Iran than there were on the eve of the First World War, but most of them have

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been uprooted from their traditional homelands. They are also now considerably outnumbered by the Assyrians and Chaldeans of the diaspora. The history of the Church of the East in the twenty-first century will be dominated by the divergent fortunes of these two groups.

For the first time in its history, the Church of the East has more members outside the Middle East than in its traditional homelands in Iraq and Iran. The fortunes of the Assyrian and Chaldean communities in the Middle East are likely to remain precarious. The future looks brightest for the Assyrian communities in Syria, despite recent unrest. The Syrian government has historically been reasonably tolerant towards its Christian minority, and the communities established in the Khabur valley in the 1930s have flourished. Life is also fairly relaxed for the Christians of the Urmia region of Iran. The consecration of Narsai Benjamin as bishop of Iran in Teheran in September 2010, the first time that an Assyrian bishop has been consecrated on Iranian soil for nearly half a century, is an encouraging sign that the Iranian authorities recognise the historic importance of the country's indigenous Christian minority. The future also looks reasonably bright for the Chaldeans of Iraq, who have long insisted that they are both Christians and loyal Iraqis. It looks less bright for the Assyrians, who will always be regarded with suspicion by the Iraqi authorities so long as their patriarch resides in America, not Iraq. If peace and stability eventually return to Iraq, some Iraqi Christians may eventually be able to return to their old villages around 'Amadiya and 'Aqra, but it is unlikely that these districts will ever again support as large a Christian population as they did in 1913. Most Iraqi Christians will probably remain in the cities, where life is safer. In Turkey, where the Assyrians and Chaldeans were driven from their historic homelands in the First World War, their descendants will be tolerated only as insignificant minorities in the large cities. There is talk of restoring the old patriarchal church in Kochanes as a cultural monument, but there is little prospect that the Turkish authorities will allow Assyrians to resettle their old villages in the Hakkari region. Ironically, although the Turks have far more on their conscience than the Iraqis, Iranians and Syrians, they have managed to conceal their crimes far more successfully than their neighbours. Although there is a growing awareness in the West of the true extent of the Turkish atrocities against the Armenians in 1915, few Americans or Europeans realise that tens of thousands of Assyrian and Chaldean Christians were also killed or driven from their homes at this period by the Turks and their Kurdish allies.

Because conditions in the Middle East are so unpredictable, the influence of the diaspora is likely to grow in both the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. The future of both Churches will probably be determined by the well-heeled congregations of the United States, which are better organised

than the other diaspora communities and considerably wealthier than their co-religionists in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The Nestorians and Chaldeans of the Middle East are, sadly, increasingly likely to be patronised as poor relations by the Christians of the diaspora. Tensions will certainly result from this shift of balance. The growing influence of the diaspora will also be matched by the growing influence of the Chaldean Church. The Chaldean Church has always been better led and organised than the Assyrian Church, and it is now larger than its rival. It owes its success to the pragmatic leadership of the Chaldean patriarch Joseph II Emmanuel and his twentieth-century successors, and will continue to flourish if it elects patriarchs of a similar stature in the twenty-first century.

It is possible to discern several possible futures for the various strands of the Church of the East. The Nestorians have rarely been noted for their ecclesiastical discipline. Their patriarchs have always found it difficult to exercise effective control over their turbulent metropolitans. Both the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches now have more dioceses for the diaspora than they do in their heartland, making it more difficult than ever to rein in an episcopate of impulsive individualists. Nestorian and Chaldean communities are now scattered all over the globe. It is conceivable that the Nestorians of California might one day press for the ordination of women. If the Nestorians of Iraq strongly disagree with this stance, there is little to stop them from going their own way. It is quite possible that the Assyrian Church of the East will eventually break up into a number of 'national' diaspora Churches, all of them perhaps in communion with one another but each under its own separate patriarch. A second possibility is that the Assyrian Church of the East will simply collapse, and that most of its members will be absorbed into the Chaldean Church.

But another future is possible for both the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church, if their patriarchs are wise and far-sighted enough to grasp the opportunity. The Syriac-speaking Churches, as Sebastian Brock has perceptively pointed out, have a potentially-enormous appeal to Asian and African Christians. Their earliest literature, the poetry of Ephrem and Aphrahat, preserves the language of a distinctive Semitic Christianity unmodified by Greek influence. Neither the Church of the East nor the Syrian Orthodox Church stood out for long against so pervasive an influence, and by the seventh century their literature and thought were thoroughly Hellenised. Nevertheless, their appeal to Christians outside Europe remains considerable. The Church of the East has marginally better credentials than the Syrian Orthodox Church, in that it developed entirely outside the Roman Empire.

In a world in which the barriers to communication are constantly falling, there is little in theory to stop the Church of the East from resuming its historic

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missionary role. At present, its patriarchs look no further afield than Alqosh and Urmia, Turlock and Modesto. There is no reason in theory why Dinkha IV Hnanya or Emmanuel III Delly should not again speak for the entire East, as their predecessors once did. The main practical obstacle to the realisation of this vision is that the Assyrian Church of the East, and to a lesser extent the Chaldean Church, are now closely associated with the Assyrian nationalist movement. A second obstacle, in the case of the Assyrian Church of the East, is that its patriarchs, although no longer appointed by hereditary succession, still have to pander to tribal influence. It is difficult for outsiders to judge how far such considerations influence the appointment of bishops and priests, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that tribal loyalties cannot yet be completely ignored. With luck, they will become less important as time goes on.

There are a number of excellent reasons for the Church of the East to distance itself from the Assyrian identity and cut its ties to the Assyrian nationalists. Firstly, the Assyrian identity is false. While it is entirely understandable that a people driven from its ancestral homelands should wish to forge a distinctive image for itself, the Assyrian identity cannot in the long run be sustained. It has little or no historical basis, and will sooner or later be discredited. Secondly, the Assyrian identity is divisive. Not only does it separate Nestorians from Chaldeans, but it also denies the Saint Thomas Christians of India their fair share of the heritage of the Church of the East. Thirdly, it is unnecessarily limiting. The Christian Church preaches a universal message, but the Church of the East's parochial obsession with Assyrian nationalism prevents it from speaking for Christians everywhere. Fourthly, it distracts the Church from its true business. The unending, rancorous debate over the Assyrian identity saps energies which could be more productively expended elsewhere. Finally, it is harmful to the image of the Church. Men are judged by the company they keep, and although most Assyrian nationalists are Christians, the nationalist ranks now include a growing number of admirers of ancient Assyrian paganism. The official Assyrian flag is devoid of overt Christian symbolism and is dominated by an image of the pagan god Ashur. The Persian Christians who died for their faith during the persecution of Shapur II would have been appalled at the thought that some of their modern descendants should so lightly bow the knee to a heathen idol.

It was once famously said of the Holy Roman Empire that it was neither holy, Roman nor an empire. In some respects, a similar observation could be made about the present title of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East. Certainly, the Church's claim to apostolicity rests on very shaky evidence, and most modern scholars dismiss it. On the other hand, as this book has sought to demonstrate, the Church can very fairly claim to be Catholic, in the sense of

adhering to orthodox Christian doctrine. It is not, and never has been, Nestorian. But it also is not, and never has been, Assyrian. Of course, it is unlikely that the Assyrian Church will drop its claim to apostolicity merely on the grounds that it is false, but it would be well advised to revisit its equally fictitious Assyrian identity, as this identity brings it few advantages and many disadvantages.

To craft a credible message, both the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches should distance themselves from the Assyrian nationalists. In particular, the Assyrian Church of the East should drop the adjective 'Assyrian' from its name and reclaim the title 'Nestorian' which it once wore with pride. The name 'Nestorian' has been hallowed by centuries of usage, and is short, sweet and memorable. Few outsiders are able to place the Assyrian Church of the East, as the modern Nestorians like to call their Church. The relentless avoidance of this convenient name by modern scholars, because of its stigma of heresy, requires them to perform the most ungainly and comical contortions. If the only objection to the brand name 'Nestorian' is its association with heresy, then it would surely be preferable to give it a makeover, by insisting that the Nestorians were not heretics, than to drop it altogether. Any competent public relations company could craft a suitable rehabilitation strategy. If the Assyrian Church of the East once again became a universal Church, it might find surprising opportunities within its grasp.

The year is 2050. The patriarch of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church of the East, Mar Timothy III, is the first Nestorian patriarch to be born in the United States. Mar Timothy of Tarzana, as he is familiarly known, was canonically elected by a synod of Nestorian bishops who met in Baghdad, the capital of democratic Iraq and the restored seat of the patriarchs of the East. His prompt consecration to the diocese of Chicago of Mar Tomis Zay^a, a well-educated descendant of the hereditary bishops of Jilu, Baz and Raikan, initially raised some eyebrows; but Mar Zay^a has shown himself to be an energetic and popular bishop, and accusations of impropriety have largely subsided. The orthodoxy of the Church of the East has finally been recognised, and it is now in communion not only with the Roman Catholic Church but with most of the Protestant Churches and with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Its spokesmen have convinced doubters that the Nestorian Church (as nearly everybody once again calls it) wears its name merely as a mark of respect for the martyred Nestorius. The general acceptance of the orthodoxy of the Church of the East has paved the way for an agreement with the Oriental Orthodox Churches under which both sides have agreed to accept each other's differing attitudes towards Nestorius and Cyril. Mar Timothy meets regularly with his Chaldean counterpart Eliya XV Awgin, a canonically-elected member of the old patriarchal family who came to the Vatican's notice with an

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important research thesis on the correspondence between the patriarch Yabballaha III (1281–1317) and King Hayton II of Cilician Armenia, recently discovered in the Armenian archives and jointly translated and edited by Mar Eliya and an Armenian Catholic bishop.

While relations between the Church of the East and the other Christian Churches are now excellent, Mar Timothy has had to devote much of his energies to healing a schism in his own Church. The bishop Sennacherib Sargis of Baghdad left the Church of the East in 2035 when it dropped the adjective ‘Assyrian’ from its name, and went on to found his own Ancient Assyrian Church of the East. Mar Sennacherib’s rebellion was acclaimed by some conservative congregations in various parts of the world, but their numbers were relatively small, suggesting that support for the Assyrian identity was far less fervent than its defenders had claimed. A minor inconvenience of the schism has been to reduce Wikipedia’s articles on the Church of the East to a condition of permanent stasis, as Nestorians and Assyrians have each sought to eliminate all traces of their opponents’ identity.

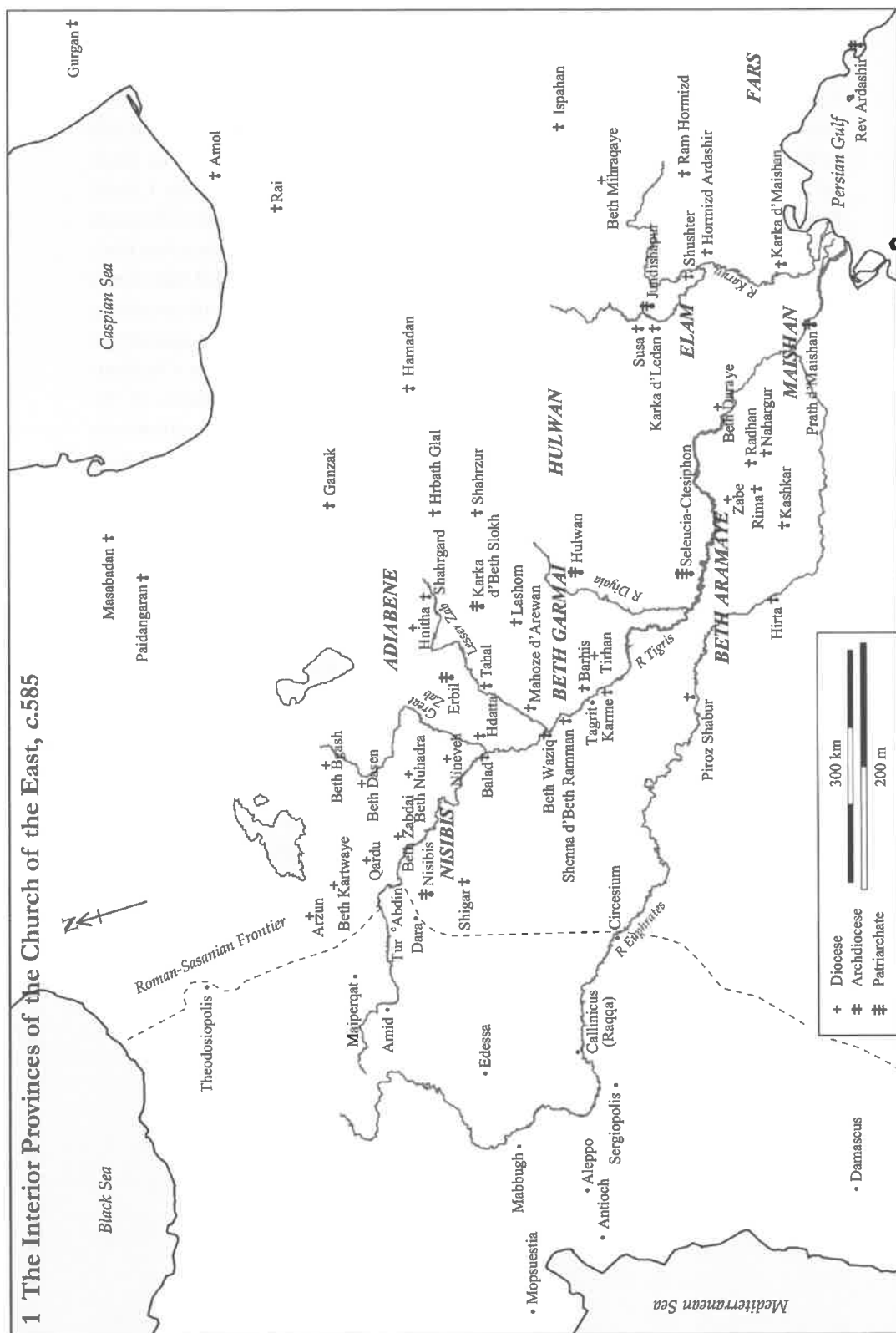
In the United States, the Nestorian and Chaldean Churches have both grown slightly in the past two decades, partly through natural increase but also because their antiquity, orthodoxy and exotic history have begun to attract significant numbers of American Christians from other denominations. Membership has also risen, though to a lesser extent, in godless Europe and Australia. Christian proselytism remains impossible in the Muslim states of Central Asia, but new windows of opportunity have opened in China, where Christianity offers an alternative vision to the dreary Socialist paradise preached by the country’s leaders. Although the Chinese government has recently restricted the activities of the Roman Catholic Church, it has failed to quench the thirst of the Chinese people for spiritual refreshment after half a century of relentless materialism. The smaller, less visible Churches have stepped in to take the place of the Catholics. Nestorian and Chaldean missionaries are both busy in China, and the Church of the East is once again represented in Sian. The Nestorian and Chaldean missionaries are warmly welcomed by Chinese Christians, who know that their forefathers were the first to bring Christianity to China. In India, the ‘Chaldean’ Syro-Malabar Church is in communion with the ‘Nestorian’ Chaldean Syrian Church, and the two Churches have recently built an elaborate shrine to Saint Thomas in Meliapur, near the traditional site of the saint’s tomb, in hopes of reviving the old pilgrim trade.

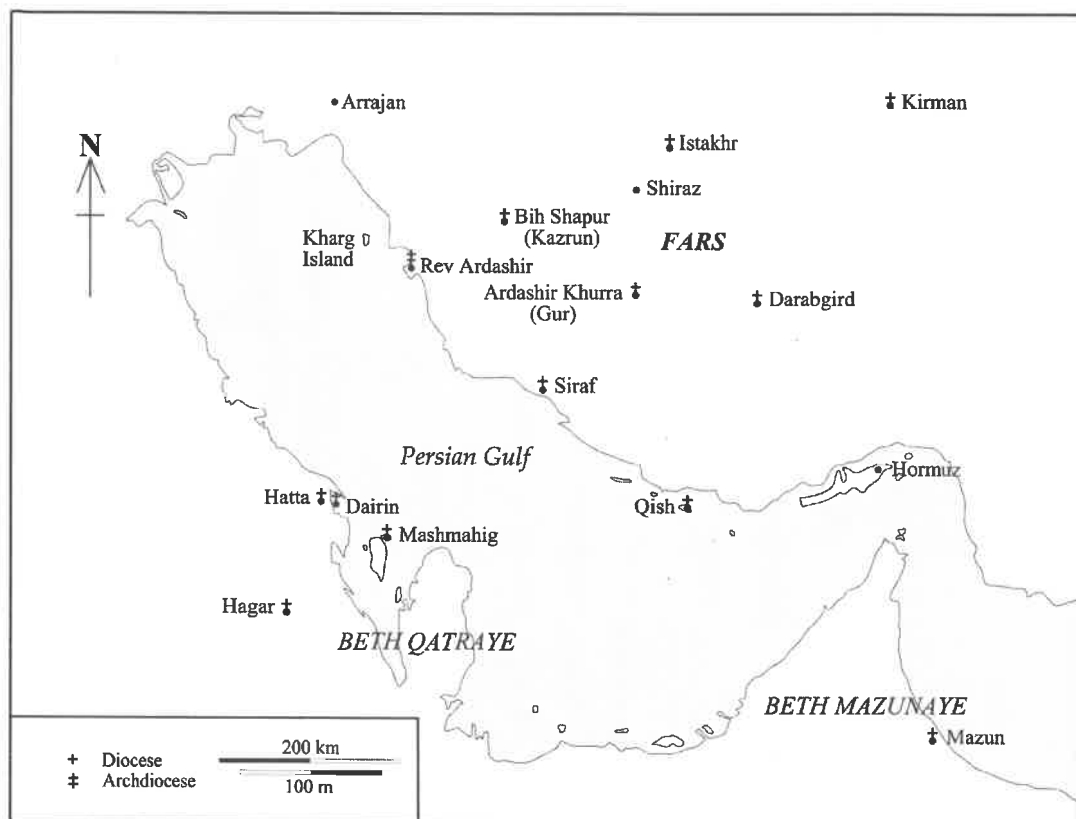
Remove one or two light-hearted flourishes from this sketch, and it is a perfectly conceivable future for the Church of the East. Significantly, it is a future considerably better than anyone would have predicted only twenty years ago. It is a far better future than anyone could have imagined in the 1920s and 1930s; and

it is an infinitely better future than anyone could have dreamed of in 1915. The reason, of course, is that this sketch assumes that Nestorians and Chaldeans will no longer be persecuted for their faith. This is an assumption that cannot be made lightly. It is very difficult to imagine such persecutions occurring in the United States or Europe, or among the other diaspora communities; but for the Christians of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria the future remains as unpredictable as it has been throughout the Church's history. At present, clashes between ruler and ruled seem more likely than clashes between Muslims and Christians in these four countries; but it has always taken very little to set their prickly Muslim majorities against the Christian minority. Fresh disasters cannot be ruled out altogether. The Chaldean priest Joseph Tfinkdji, who praised the nineteenth-century achievements of the Chaldean Church in his 1914 article 'L'église chaldéenne catholique autrefois et aujourd'hui', looked forward to similar progress during the twentieth century. The article was written only months before the outbreak of the First World War, and its author could not have guessed the horrors that lay in store for his Church only one year later, during the massacres of 1915.

The Church of the East has many faults, and I have not attempted to gloss over them in this book. At the same time, it has witnessed to the truth of the Christian faith in and beyond the lands of Islam for more than a millennium, often under the most difficult conditions and sometimes under the threat of persecution. Few Churches have had to struggle throughout their history against such daunting odds. Those who wish the Church of the East well, as I do, can only hope and pray that the twenty-first century will be kinder than the twentieth, and that both the Assyrian Church and the Chaldean Church will be given a breathing space to recover from their recent ordeals. For most of the twentieth century neither Church enjoyed the blessings of peace. Readers of this book will surely agree that it is a blessing that they now richly deserve.

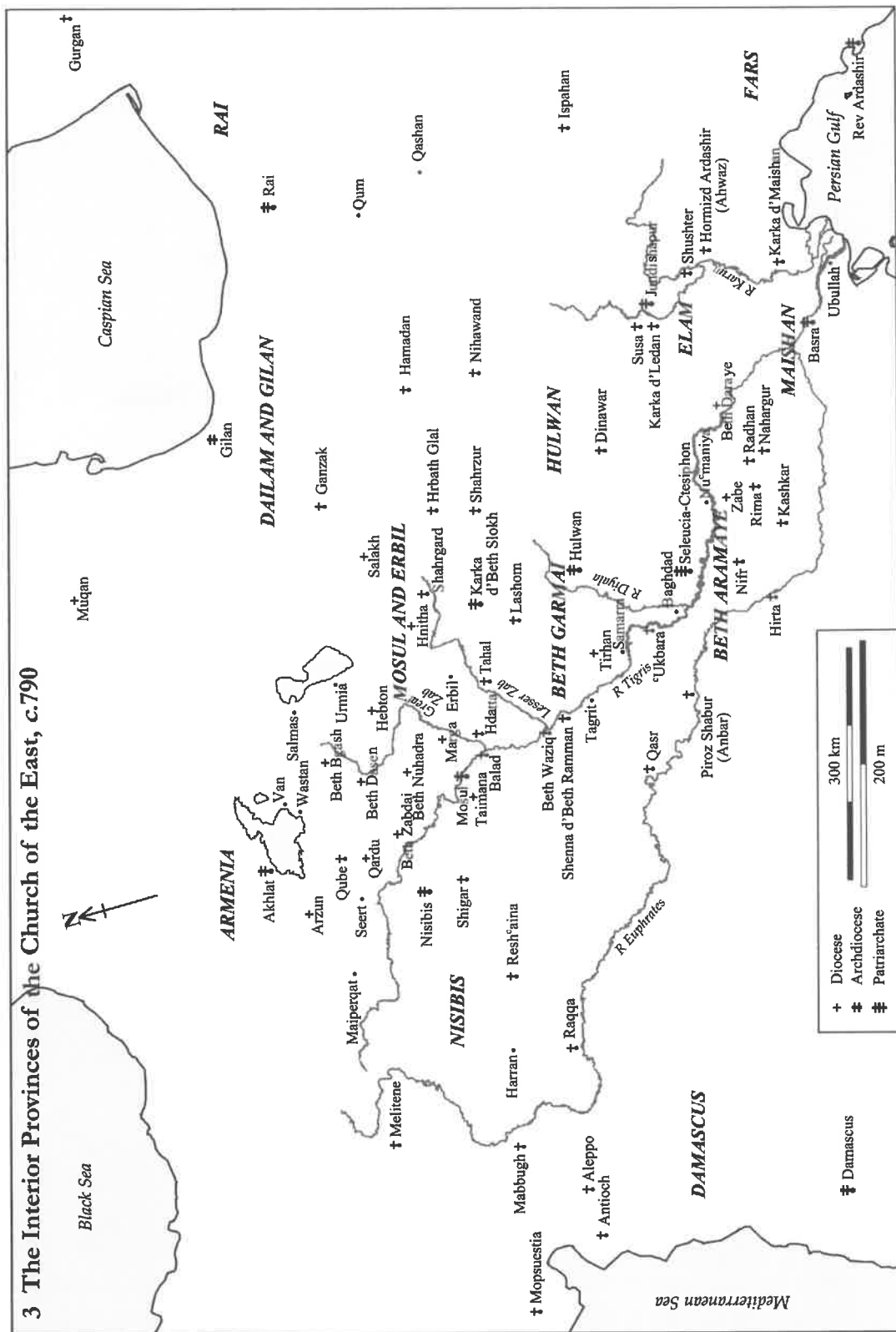
1 The Interior Provinces of the Church of the East, c.585

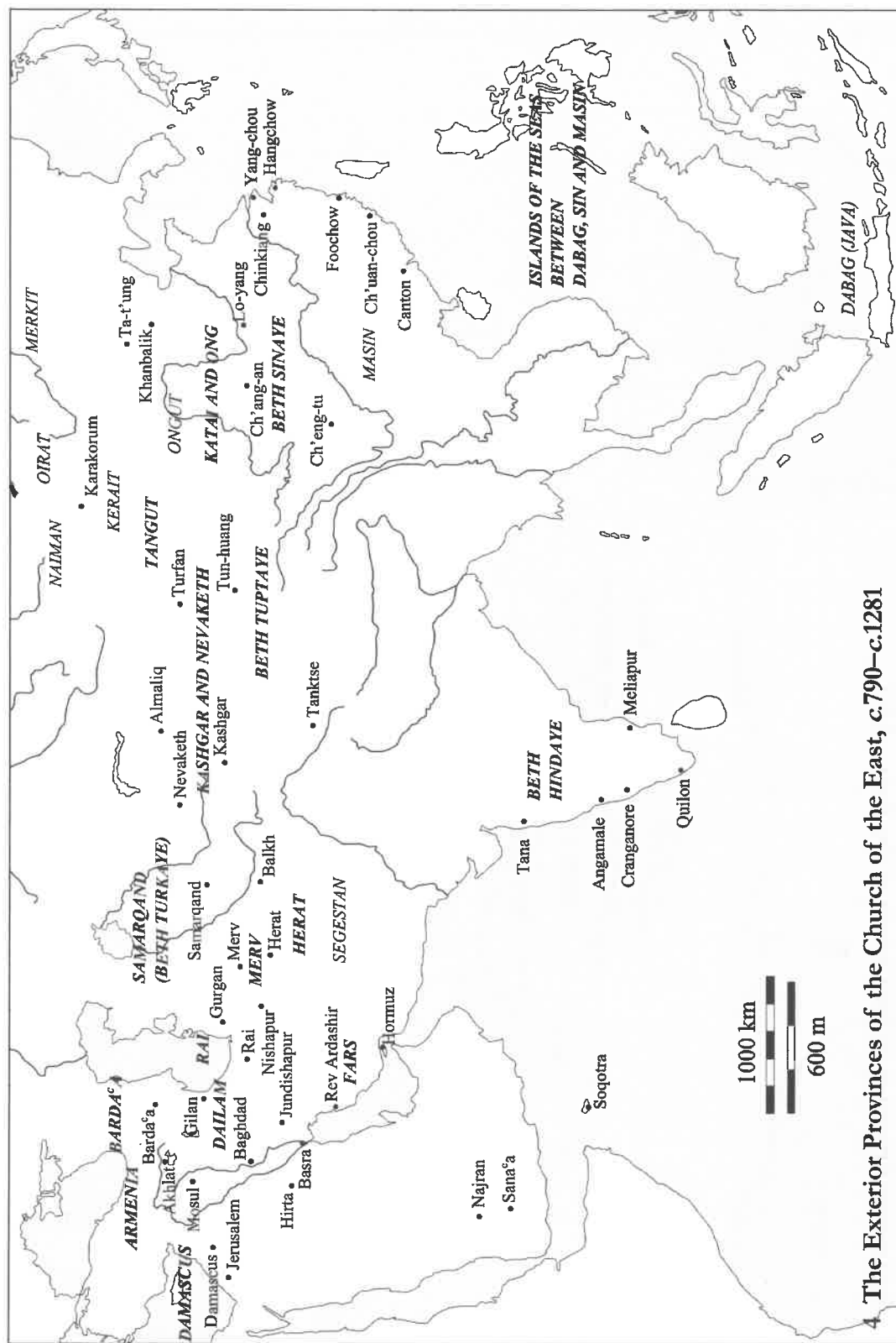




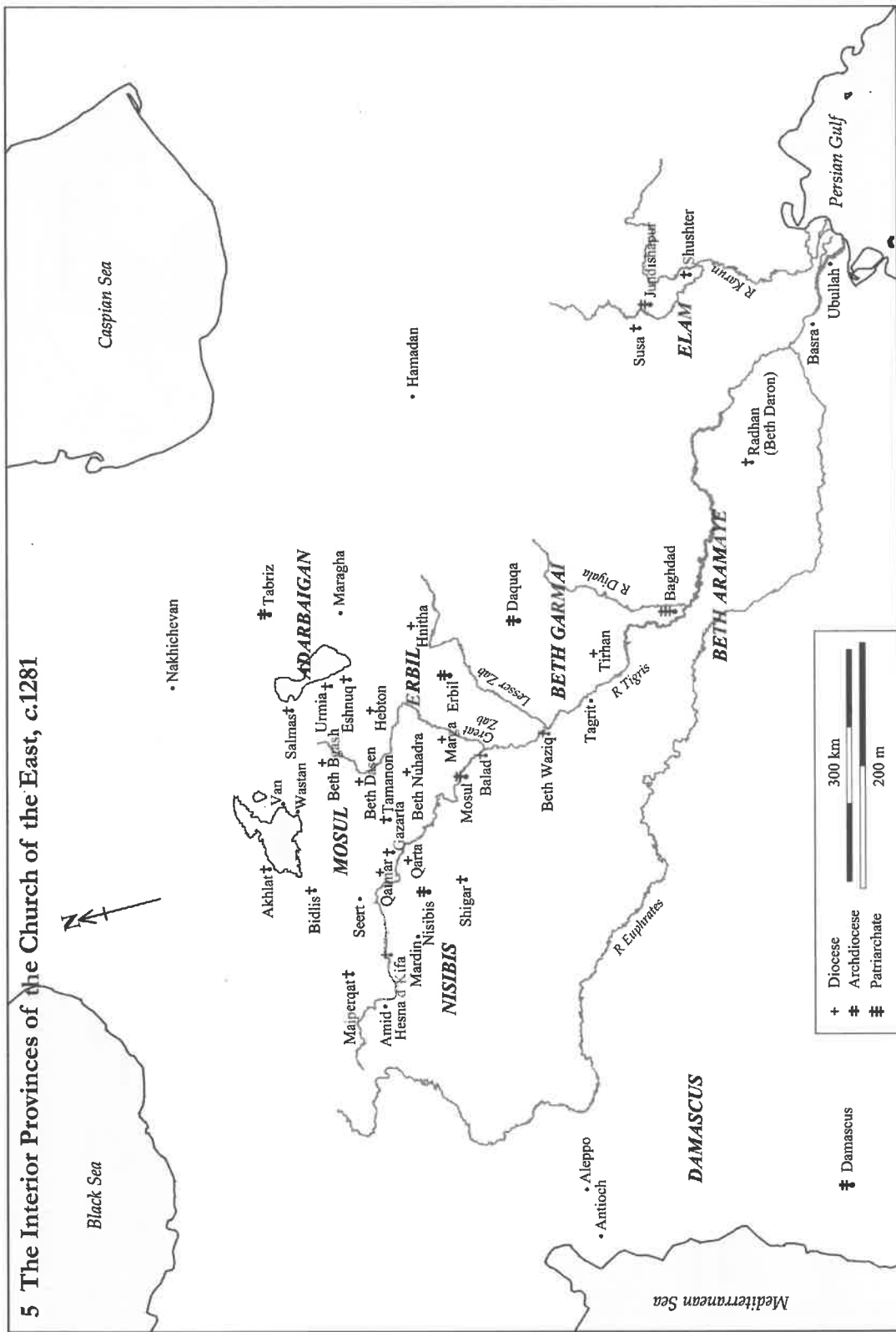
2 Nestorian Communities in Fars and Northern Arabia, c. 585

3 The Interior Provinces of the Church of the East, c.790

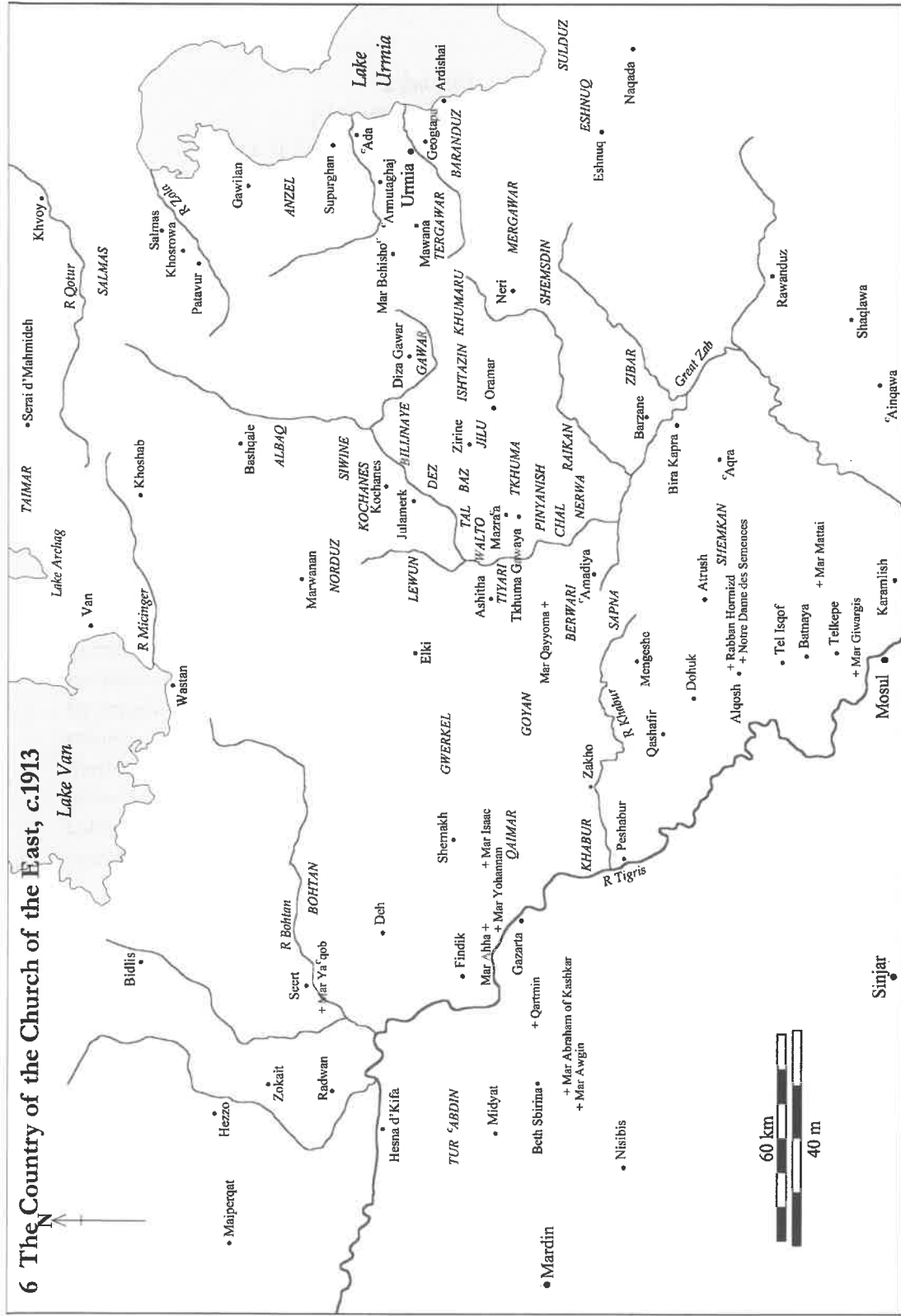




5 The Interior Provinces of the Church of the East, c.1281



6 The Country of the Church of the East, c.1913



Appendix
THE PATRIARCHS
OF THE CHURCH OF THE EAST

The following list provides a convenient summary of the present state of knowledge of the patriarchal succession of the Church of the East. The list only contains the names of individuals who (a) actually existed, and (b) are generally recognised as primates of the Church of the East. It does not include Saint Peter, who had no connection whatsoever with the Persian Church; nor the apostle Mar Addai, whose legend was invented between the third and sixth centuries; nor the second-century patriarchs Abris, Abraham and Ya'qob, who were invented in the ninth century; nor the third-century patriarchs Shahlufa and Aha d'Abuh, two historical bishops of Erbil who were retrospectively promoted. Neither does it include 'Denha III (1359–68)', invented by the priest Joseph Qellaita in the 1920s; nor 'Shem'on VIII Denha (1551–8)', invented by Yohannan Sulaqa's supporters in 1552 to conceal the fact of their rebellion against the reigning patriarch Shem'on VII Isho'yahb (1539–58); nor 'Eliya VI (1558–76)', whose existence is disproved by the epitaph of Eliya VII (1558–91). Augustine Hindi, the self-styled patriarch 'Joseph V' who administered the Amid patriarchate between 1802 and his death in 1827, does not strictly speaking qualify, as he was recognised by the Vatican merely as administrator of the Amid patriarchate and was never formally accorded the title of patriarch; but he is conventionally listed as a patriarch, and I have reluctantly observed this convention.

There have been several counter-patriarchs in the history of the Church of the East, and several patriarchs whose reigns were later declared illegitimate. For simplicity's sake, I have listed them all as patriarchs, as they may well have enjoyed considerable support before their memory was vilified. Narsai and Elisha' (524–39) are therefore both listed as legitimate patriarchs, as are Farbokht (421), Yohannan the Leper (691–3) and Surin (753), despite their unsavoury posthumous reputations. The sixteenth-century patriarchs Shem'on V (1497–1502) and Eliya V (1503–4) may have been counter-patriarchs, but there is so little evidence for their reigns that they have been given the benefit of the doubt. I was initially tempted to classify Yohannan Sulaqa (1553–5) as a counter-patriarch; but as his rebellion in 1552 was supported by most educated Nestorians, he has at least as

reasonable a claim to legitimacy as Yohannan the Leper. On the same principle, I have recognised Thomas Darmo (1968–9) and Addai II Giwargis (since 1972) as legitimate patriarchs, though I am conscious that their status is precarious and might well be subject to later review.

Although the reigns of most of the primates of the Church of the East can be accurately dated, several areas of uncertainty remain. The patriarchal succession in the second half of the fourth century was complicated by the continuing persecution of Christians in Persia during the decades that followed Shapur II's treaty with the Romans in 363, and the dates assigned to the reign of Tomarsa (388–95) may well need to be refined. The patriarchal succession in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is also unclear. It is not known when Timothy II (1318–c.1332) died. The forty-five year reign attributed to the patriarch Denha II (1336/7–1381/2), although unusually long, is not unparalleled (Timothy I reigned for forty-three years, and Shemʿon XXI Eshai for fifty-five years), and is supported by the evidence of manuscript colophons. I have postulated the existence of the patriarch 'Shemʿon III (c.1425–c.1450)' to avoid assigning an impossibly long reign to his successor Shemʿon IV Basidi (c.1450–1497), and to the best of my knowledge I am the first scholar to do so. My proposed reign dates for the patriarchs Shemʿon II (c.1385–c.1405), Eliya IV (c.1405–c.1425), Shemʿon III (c.1425–c.1450) and Shemʿon IV Basidi (c.1450–1497) match the evidence of a number of surviving manuscript colophons, but given the scarcity of information for this period can only be regarded as approximate. It is also unclear whether the reign dates assigned to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Kochanes patriarchs by the Anglican missionary William Ainger Wigram rest on reliable evidence. These conventional dates correlate with the evidence from the surviving correspondence of the Kochanes patriarchs with the Vatican, but may have been inferred by Wigram precisely on that basis. Unless and until better evidence turns up, they should be regarded as provisional. These and other problems are discussed more fully in the relevant chapters of this book.

Lists of the patriarchs of the Church of the East frequently attempt to assign a long string of patriarchs to a single patriarchal residence, such as Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Baghdad, Mosul and Kochanes. I am wary of following suit, as the certainty suggested in such models is deceptive, and tends to dissolve when the evidence is scrutinised more closely. Some patriarchs moved several times during their reigns, or had more than one residence, or preferred to remain in seclusion instead of governing the Church. The patriarch Denha I (1265–81), for example, resided for part of his reign in Erbil, then moved to Eshnuq. Yahballaha III (1281–1317) lived for much of his reign in the monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Maragha, but also visited Baghdad from time to time. It is fair to say that

most of the predecessors of Hnanisho^c II (773–80) resided in or near Seleucia-Ctesiphon, though there were important exceptions. The fifth-century patriarch Dadisho^c (421–56) withdrew to Hirta during the later decades of his reign, and his example was followed a century later by Isho^cyahb I (585–95). The patriarch Aba I (540–52) spent most of his patriarchate on the road, touring the far-flung dioceses of Persia and southern Iraq. The move from Seleucia-Ctesiphon to Baghdad was made by Hnanisho^c II (773–80), not (as sometimes claimed) by his more glamorous successor Timothy I (780–823), and for the next five hundred years most (but not all) of the Nestorian patriarchs normally resided in Baghdad. The ʿAbbasid capital was moved temporarily to Samarra in the ninth century, and the Nestorian patriarch Sargis (860–72) resided in Samarra in preference to Baghdad. His predecessor Theodosius (853–8) may also have lived in Samarra during his final years, though he spent most of his reign in prison (probably, though not certainly, in Baghdad). The last Nestorian patriarch to reside habitually in Baghdad was Makkikha II (1257–65), who witnessed the city's sack by the Mongols in 1258.

For the next three centuries, the Nestorian patriarchs seem to have resided wherever they felt safest. Denha I (1265–81) is associated with Erbil and Eshnuq, Yahballaha III (1281–1317) with Maragha, Timothy II (1318–c.1332) with the monastery of Mar Mikha'il of Tar'il near Erbil, and Denha II (1336/7–1381/2) with the Mosul plain village of Karamlish. We do not know where the fifteenth-century Nestorian patriarchs lived, and attempts to place them either at Mosul or Alqosh seem little more than wishful thinking. Shem^con IV Basidi (c.1450–1497) was buried in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh, but did not necessarily live there during his reign. His immediate successors are associated with Gazarta, Mosul and the monastery of Mar Awgin near Nisibis, not with Alqosh.

The tragic patriarchate of Yohannan Sulaqa (1553–5) was so brief that it would be eccentric to claim that he had a permanent residence. His successor ʿAbdisho^c IV Maron (1555–70) seems to have lived for much of his reign in the monastery of Mar Ya'qob the Recluse near Seert, and the third uniate patriarch Shem^con VIII Yahballaha may also have resided there. Shem^con IX Denha (1580–1600) is associated with the Salmas district. Shem^con X (1600–38) moved from Salmas to remote Kochanes, and as far as is known his successors all resided in Kochanes until 1915, though they also had 'patriarchal cells' elsewhere, notably in Urmia and Ashitha. The patriarchs of the Eliya line, the lineal successors of Shem^con VII Isho^cyahb (1539–58), lived in the Mosul district, but it is not always clear where. They are variously recorded to have had residences in Mosul itself and in Alqosh, Telkepe and Tel Isqof. They were nearly all buried in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, but may not necessarily have resided there. Yohannan VIII Hormizd

and most of the other nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chaldean patriarchs of Babylon normally divided their residence between Mosul and Baghdad. The present Chaldean patriarch, Emmanuel III Delly, resides in the village of Telkepe.

Attempts at neatness founder with the twentieth-century Assyrian patriarchs. The invalid Shem'on XX Paul (1918–20) resided for most of his brief patriarchate in the Jacobite monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul. The much-travelled Shem'on XXI Eshai (1920–75) had several residences, in Iraq, Cyprus and Europe, before he finally settled in Chicago. His successor Dinkha IV Hnanya, the present patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, also resides in Chicago, though if conditions are right he may one day return to Iraq and restore the patriarchate to its old home in Baghdad. Addai II Giwargis has resided in Baghdad throughout his patriarchate, and his residence in Iraq is one of the few respects in which he can claim an edge over his rival.

I am also wary of assigning religious labels to the patriarchs of the Church of the East. In the past, several patriarchs have been claimed as Catholics on little more evidence than a polite exchange of letters with the Vatican, and there has been a misleading tendency to assume that the 'union with Rome' meant as much to the Nestorian patriarchs as it did to the Vatican. I have honoured tradition to the extent of listing Yohannan Sulaqa and his three immediate successors as 'uniate patriarchs', but I am by no means sure that Shem'on VIII Yahballaha and Shem'on IX Denha were Catholics, although they obviously wanted the Vatican to assume that they were. I do not believe, on the basis of a close reading of their surviving correspondence, that any of the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Mosul or Kochanes patriarchs were Catholics. The death of 'Abdisho' IV Maron (1555–70) effectively ended the 'union with Rome' for a century, before it was revived with the creation of the uniate Amid patriarchate in 1681. Joseph I (1681–93) and his four successors were, of course, devout Catholics. The Mosul patriarchate only became uniate in the early nineteenth century with the accession of Yohannan VIII Hormizd (1830–7), a bad patriarch but a good Catholic. All of his successors have also been Catholics.

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The Bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, c.280–399

Papa bar Aggai (c.280–329)
 Shem'on bar Sabba'e (329–44)
 Shahdost (344–5)
 Barba'shmin (345–6)
Vacant, 346–88
 Tomarsa (388–95)
 Qayyoma (395–9).

The Metropolitans of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, 399–421

Isaac (399–410)
 Ahai (410–14)
 Yahballaha I (415–20)
 Ma'na (420)
 Farbokht (421).

The Catholics of the Church of the East, 421–1558

Dadisho^c (421–56)
 Babowai (457–84)
 Acacius (485–96)
 Babai (497–502)
 Shila (503–23)
 Narsai (524–39)
 Elisha^c (524–39)
 Paul (539)
 Aba I (540–52)
 Joseph (552–67)
Vacant, 567–70
 Ezekiel (570–81)
Vacant, 581–5
 Isho'yahb I of Arzun (585–95)
 Sabrisho^c I (596–604)
 Gregory (605–8)
Vacant, 609–28
 Isho'yahb II of Gdala (628–45)
 Maremmeh (645–8)
 Isho'yahb III of Adiabene (649–59)

Giwargis I (660–80)
 Yohannan I bar Marta (681–3)
 Hnanisho^c I (686–98)
 Yohannan the Leper (691–3)
Vacant, 698–714
 Sliba-zkha (714–28)
 Pethion (731–40)
 Aba II (741–51)
 Surin (753)
 Ya'qob II (753–73)
 Hnanisho^c II (773–80)
 Timothy I (780–823)
 Isho^c Bar Nun (823–8)
 Giwargis II (828–31)
 Sabrisho^c II (831–5)
 Abraham II (837–50)
 Theodosius (853–8)
 Sargis (860–72)
Vacant, 872–7
 Enosh (877–84)
 Yohannan II (884–92)
 Yohannan III (893–9)
 Yohannan IV (900–5)
 Abraham III (906–37)
 Emmanuel I (937–60)
 Israel (961)
 'Abdisho^c I (963–86)
 Mari bar Tuba (987–99)
 Yohannan V (1000–11)
 Yohannan VI (1012–20)
 Isho'yahb IV (1020–5)
 Eliya I (1028–49)
 Yohannan VII bar Targhal (1049–57)
Vacant, 1057–64
 Sabrisho^c III (1064–72)
 'Abdisho^c II ibn al-'Arid (1074–90)
 Makkikha I (1092–1110)
 Eliya II (1111–32)
 Bar Sawma (1134–6)
 'Abdisho^c III (1139–49)
 Isho'yahb V ibn al-Hayik (1149–75)
 Eliya III Abu Halim (1176–90)
 Yahballaha II (1190–1222)
 Sabrisho^c IV bar Qayyoma (1222–4)

Appendix: The Patriarchs of the Church of the East

Sabrisho^c V (1226–56)
Makkikha II (1257–65)
Denha I (1265–81)
Yahballaha III (1281–1317)
Timothy II (1318–c.1332)
Denha II (1336/7–1381/2)
Shem^{on} II (c.1385–c.1405)
Eliya IV (c.1405–c.1425)
Shem^{on} III (c.1425–c.1450)
Shem^{on} IV Basidi (c.1450–1497)
Shem^{on} V (1497–1502)
Eliya V (1503–4)
Shem^{on} VI (1504–38)
Shem^{on} VII Isho^{yahb} (1539–58).

The Uniate Patriarchs, 1553–1600

Yohannan Sulaqa (1553–5)
‘Abdisho^c IV Maron (1555–70)
Shem^{on} VIII Yahballaha (1570–80)
Shem^{on} IX Denha (1580–1600).

The Mosul Patriarchs, 1558–1804

Eliya VII (1558–91)
Eliya VIII (1591–1617)
Eliya IX Shem^{on} (1617–60)
Eliya X Yohannan Marogin (1660–1700)
Eliya XI Marogin (1700–22)
Eliya XII Denha (1722–78)
Eliya XIII Isho^{yahb} (1778–1804).

The Amid Patriarchs, 1681–1827

Joseph I (1681–93)
Joseph II (1696–1713)
Joseph III (1713–57)
Joseph IV (1757–96).
Augustine Hindi (patriarchal
administrator, 1802–27, self-styled
patriarch ‘Joseph V’).

The Kochanes Patriarchs, 1600–1918

Shem^{on} X (1600–38)
Shem^{on} XI (1638–56)
Shem^{on} XII (1656–62)
Shem^{on} XIII Denha (1662–1700)
Shem^{on} XIV Shlemun (1700–40)
Shem^{on} XV Mikha’il Mukhtas (1740–80)
Shem^{on} XVI Yohannan (1780–1820)
Shem^{on} XVII Abraham (1820–61)
Shem^{on} XVIII Rubil (1861–1903)
Shem^{on} XIX Benjamin (1903–18).

The Patriarchs of the Assyrian Church of the East since 1920

Shem^{on} XX Paul (1918–20)
Shem^{on} XXI Eshai (1920–75)
Dinkha IV Hnanya (since 1976).

The Patriarchs of the Ancient Church of the East since 1968

Thomas Darmo (1968–9)
Addai II Giwargis (since 1972).

The Chaldean Patriarchs of Babylon since 1780

Yohannan VIII Hormizd (patriarchal
administrator, 1780–1830; patriarch,
1830–7)
Nicholas I Za^{ya} (1840–7)
Joseph VI Audo (1848–79)
Eliya XII ‘Abulyonan (1879–94)
‘Abdisho^c V Khayyat (1895–9)
Emmanuel II Thomas (1900–47)
Joseph VII Ghanima (1947–58)
Paul II Cheikho (1958–89)
Raphael I Bidawid (1989–2003)
Emmanuel III Delly (since 2003).

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ABBREVIATIONS OF PERIODICAL TITLES

- AB* = *Analecta Bollandiana*
- AOP* = *Analecta Ordinis Praedicatorum*
- BJRL* = *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
- DTC* = *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*
- JA* = *Journal Asiatique*
- JAAS* = *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society*
- JHKBRAS* = *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*
- JRGS* = *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*
- JSA* = *Journal of Social Affairs*
- LM* = *Le Muséon*
- OC* = *Oriens Christianus*
- OCA* = *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*
- OCP* = *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
- OS* = *L'Orient Syrien*
- PO* = *Parole de l'Orient*
- POC* = *Proche-Orient Chrétien*
- ROC* = *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*

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